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DEALING WITH GRIEF

All of us must face the reality of death at some point in our lives -- the reality of being separated from a cherished loved one.

It is uncomfortable for many people to think about death and contemplate its eventuality. Yet only then can we come to fully understand the value and meaning of our lives and of those around us. Only then can we begin to live our lives to the fullest.

Every death changes the lives of those close to the deceased person. The ability to change and adapt to changes around you is the key to accepting and dealing with death. As in other aspects of our lives, the more we resist and fight against inevitable changes, the more pain we experience and the more unhappy we become.

In experiencing grief we may go through a full range of sometimes contradictory emotions such as denial, anger, sorrow, guilt, and relief. We may even fluctuate from feeling stable to being deeply depressed. Ultimately, we must arrive at acceptance, the last stage of the process. We know we have achieved this stage when we can see the life of our loved one as a fond memory instead of dwelling on the person's death as a harsh reality. Only then can we go on living our own lives again.

According to research there are generally 10 stages in the grieving process:

1. **Shock and surprise.** News of someone's death is almost always a shock. The reality of the death may occur in a few minutes or a few days.
2. **Emotional release.** The release of tension and feelings is necessary and usually occurs at the funeral or with family and friends, but it is only the beginning of the grieving process.
3. **Loneliness.** After the funeral, when family and friends have gone home, feelings of emptiness may occur. Feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression begin.
4. **Physical distress and anxiety.** This stage can make the person feel so alone that he or she may develop the same physical symptoms that the deceased had.
5. **Panic.** It may become difficult to concentrate on anything because of constant memories of the deceased. In fact, this may cause a person to worry about his or her own stability. Not knowing what to do or what is happening can result in panic and weakened self-esteem.
6. **Guilt.** The surviving person dwells on the things he or she could have done for the deceased. They may also feel responsible for the person's death.
7. **Hostility and projection.** This is a difficult stage for relatives and friends because the survivor suddenly becomes hostile to those whom he or she thinks could have prevented the death. Family and friends should try to be tolerant and non-defensive.
8. **Lassitude.** The person suffers in silence, weary from the depression and frustration. Becoming more active is the answer.
9. **Gradual overcoming of grief.** Through the affection and encouragement of friends and family, gradually a new meaning of life unfolds. The person's outlook becomes brighter and more realistic.
10. **Readjustment to reality.** Recalling the deceased becomes a pleasant experience and planning for the future becomes more realistic.

If you are grieving, and you are experiencing any of these symptoms, realize that they are all quite normal and in many ways a necessary part of the process.