



## **APPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS YOU CAN HAVE FOR YOURSELF IN GRIEF**

The following is a list of appropriate expectations that you can have in grief. Evaluate yourself using each one and see if you are maintaining realistic expectations for yourself:

You can expect that:

- Your grief will take longer than most people think.
- Your grief will take more energy than you would have ever imagined.
- Your grief will involve many changes and be continually developing.
- Your grief will show itself in all spheres of your life: psychological, social, and physical.
- Your grief will depend on how you perceive the loss.
- You will grieve for many things both symbolic and tangible, not just the death alone.
- You will grieve for what you have lost already and for what you have lost for the future.
- Your grief will entail mourning not only for the actual person you lost but also for all the hopes, dreams, and unfulfilled expectations you held for and with that person, and for the needs that will go unmet because of their death.
- Your grief will involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions, not solely those that are generally thought of as grief, such as depression and sadness.
- The loss will resurrect old issues, feelings, and unresolved conflicts from the past.
- You will have some identity confusion as a result of this major loss and the fact that you are experiencing reactions that may be quite different than your usual behavior and thoughts. You may have a combination of anger and depression, such as irritability, frustration, annoyance, or intolerance.
- You may feel some anger and guilt, or at least some manifestation of these emotions.
- You may have a lack of self-concern.
- You may experience grief spasms, acute upsurges of grief that occur suddenly without warning.
- You may have trouble thinking (memory, organization and intellectual processing) and making decisions.
- You may feel like you are going crazy.

- You may be obsessed with death and preoccupied with the deceased.
- You may begin a search for meaning and may question your religion and/or philosophy of life.
- You may find yourself acting socially in ways that are different from before.
- You may find yourself having a number of physical reactions.
- You may find that there are certain dates, events, and stimuli that bring upsurges of grief.
- Society will likely have unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately to you.
- Certain experiences later in life may resurrect intense grief for you temporarily.

In summary, your grief will bring with it, depending upon the combination of factors above, an intense amount of emotion that will surprise you and those around you. Most of us are unprepared for the global response we have to a major loss. Our expectations tend to be too unrealistic and more often than not, we receive insufficient assistance from friends and society. Your grief will not only be more intense than you expected, but it will also be manifested in more areas and ways than you ever anticipated. You can expect to see brief upsurges of it at anniversaries and holiday times, and in response to certain stimuli that will remind you of what you have lost. Your grief will be very idiosyncratic and dependent upon the meaning of your loss, your own personal characteristics, and the type of death, your social support and your physical state.

From "How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies" by Therese A. Rando