

## **CISM Grief Information Sheet**

Eastern PA Regional CISM Team

Grief is the normal and bewildering cluster of ordinary human emotions arising in response to a significant loss, intensified and complicated by the relationship to the person or the object lost. Guilt, shame, loneliness, anxiety, anger, terror, bewilderment, emptiness, profound sadness, despair, helplessness: all are part of grief and all are common to being human. Grief is the clustering of some or all of these emotions in response to loss.

*All Our Losses/ All Our Grievs* by Mitchell and Anderson, p. 54-55.

After a sudden death, you may experience grief in the wide range of emotions listed above. Initially though, don't be surprised if you feel shocked or are unable to take in your loss. These are normal reactions to an unexpected loss.

### **Here are some of the common signs and symptoms of Grief:**

- Feeling emotionally overwhelmed: unable to feel anything at all, feeling flat or unsure about how you feel.
- Being confused or disoriented about the death that has just occurred, (“Did it really happen? “It isn’t real.”)
- Staying constantly busy or feeling frozen and unable to do anything at all.
- Unable to stop thinking about the person or having a hard time remembering the look of their face or the sound of their voice.
- Fearful that something else horrible will happen and having concern for your own health.
- Worrying about the safety of other loved ones, needing to protect or keep them safe.
- Physical pain or symptoms in your own body such as:
  - A broken heart
  - Pining or yearning
  - Hearing the voice of the one who died
  - Feeling how far away the person who died is
  - Expecting the person to walk around the corner or to be on the other end of the phone
  - If the person who died did so as a result of surgery or physical injury, you may experience pain in your own body in those same areas
- Isolating from friends or family or feeling overwhelmed when with others
- Withdrawing into yourself
- Appearing depressed
- Seeing that relationships are changing: those you expect to be supportive are not and those that you didn't expect to be are supportive.
- Try to listen to the intention of other's concern rather than to the comments (“Isn't it time to move on?” “Aren't you over it by now?”)
- Feeling angry with God, questioning beliefs, or holding tighter to faith to make sense out of the loss. (“God must have needed them more than I do.”)
- Anger with the person who has died. Feeling abandoned.

There are many ways to grieve and everyone grieves in their own unique way. Grief is not linear. And although it changes over time, grief never really ends. We come to find meaning again in new things and adjust to life without the one who has died in it. They are always missed but we find a way to continue to live with them in our memories and heart.

### **Things to Consider as You Grieve:**

1. Try to find some sort of routine (walk the dog, water the flowers, wash the dishes)
2. Don't make any big decisions (to sell the house, throw all of the loved one's things away or things that remind you of the person who has died)
3. Care for yourself physically:
  - Try to rest even though you may not be able to sleep
  - Try to eat even though you aren't hungry and/or nothing tastes good
  - Try to get some exercise (Go for a walk)
  - Try to get a little sun every day
4. Know that it may be hard to reach out to friends.
5. Expect that it will be hard to talk about the person who has died over and over again.
6. It's important to nurture yourself and treat yourself gently and patiently.

### **For Caregivers:**

Offering support to people after they have experienced a death can bring us in touch with our own losses and place us in a position that knowing what to say or do may be hard.

Here are some guidelines:

1. Maintain contact – initially people are in shock and will be surrounded by friends and family but within a few weeks they are left to deal with the reality of their loss alone. They may not always be good at asking for what they need or want so stay in touch. Offer to be there (go for a walk, stop at the grocery store for them, talk on the phone, or help with family responsibilities).
  - What to say: “I was thinking about Jim today...” or “I was thinking about you today and wondering how you were doing.”
2. Talk less and listen more – but if they are not talking... Silence is OK.
  - Sit quietly with them. Offer to get them a cup of tea.
  - Try not to introduce topics that are distracting.
  - Talk about the person's memories of or relationship with the person who died.
  - Be aware of yourself (How are you feeling? How are you doing right now?)
  - Use a calm voice. Talk slowly. Move slowly.
  - Follow their lead related to eye contact, touch, and personal space.
3. Offer on-going support by using the following script: “Since grief occurs over time and has its ups and downs, you may want to talk to someone. You could call your physician, spiritual leader, or the Critical Incident Stress Management Team at 610-973-1624.”

**To contact the CISM program, call the Hotline 610-973-1624 available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**