



## TIPS ON HOW TO COPE WITH GRIEF AS A FAMILY

- **Tolerate differences and be patient with one another.**
  - ✦ To openly communicate and understand one another, you must be sensitive to how each family member reacts to a loss.
  - ✦ Feelings such as anger, helplessness, guilt, confusion, denial, numbness and relief will vary between family members and may be experienced at different times.
- **Anticipate that sharing your grief might be difficult.**
  - ✦ Often families are hesitant to talk about death because they are overwhelmed by emotions, and are worried that they will upset others.
  - ✦ Not sharing with your loved ones can lead to greater feelings of isolation and loneliness; it is difficult to work through grief by yourself.
- **Include all members of the family unit.**
  - ✦ Remember that children grieve too.
  - ✦ Both young and old can talk about their losses to one another.
  - ✦ Treat each family member's needs as being just as important as others.
- **Changing family roles and responsibilities.**
  - ✦ After a death, the family needs to reorganize to replace the roles and responsibilities filled by the deceased.
  - ✦ Avoid overwhelming a member with new responsibilities that will distract them from facing own grief.
  - ✦ Do not expect only one person to be the supporter for entire family.
- **Don't forget to take care of yourself.**
  - ✦ Grief often makes us feel tired, so allow yourself to rest. Take naps, listen to music or drink a glass of warmed milk before bed.
  - ✦ Eat regular, balanced meals.
  - ✦ Make time for the family to get out of the house for some activity: playing at the park, go for a bike ride or walk , play a game.
- **Remember together.**
  - ✦ Create a scrapbook of photos, letters, poems and mementos that the family can work on collectively.
- **Keep changes minimal.**
  - ✦ Limit adjustments such as moving houses, switching jobs or changing routines.
  - ✦ Free up schedules as much as possible to eliminate any stress on the family.
- **Important dates or holidays may trigger the experience or cause the revisiting of grief.**
  - ✦ These include birthdays, anniversaries, a wedding, graduation, a visit to the hospital, the day when patient was admitted, or daily routines (meals).
  - ✦ Expect that you will experience some sorrow on these days.
  - ✦ Surround yourself with supportive and understanding family or friends so you can share your thoughts and feelings.
  - ✦ Find a ritual that will allow for acknowledgment of the death and celebration of the event: make a donation in your loved ones honor or reminisce over photos and family videos.

- **Collectively decide what family traditions will continue, be added or change.**
  - ✦ Family traditions such as games night, Saturday morning breakfasts or annual ski trips might cause distress for some but be comforting to others.
  - ✦ Make sure you discuss any changes as a group so that everyone can participate.
- **Maintain a supportive family environment.**
  - ✦ Hold regular family meetings or schedule meal times where all members can attend.
  - ✦ Give everyone the opportunity to share how they are feeling or what they are going through, to ask questions and listen to others.
- **Coping with a loss is an ongoing process.**
  - ✦ Expect that the experience of the loss will emerge at later points in life.
  - ✦ Families develop and change over time. At each stage a new realization about the loss can be made, new questions can be asked and better coping mechanisms may be discovered.
- **It is okay to accept outside help.**
  - ✦ When the whole family is experiencing grief, it may be hard to rely on one another for advice and comfort. Turn to friends and loved ones; ask for help with groceries, picking up kids from school or some household chores.
  - ✦ Support groups and family counseling is also available.

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