

Transitioning Through Grief

Bereavement affects people in different ways. There's no right or wrong way to feel. You might feel a lot of emotions at once. Powerful feelings can come unexpectedly, like waves on a beach. Imagine that you're standing in water up to your knees, feeling like you're in control, then suddenly a big wave comes and knocks you off your feet. That's how grief feels sometimes.

Usually the first reaction to death is shock and numbness. Some people describe it as being in a daze. Then there's overwhelming sadness, with lots of crying. Along with this comes tiredness or exhaustion, partially from sleeplessness that often accompanies intense grief.

You may feel anger toward what you may perceive as the cause of the death. You may feel guilty for feeling angry, about something you said or didn't say, or about not being able to stop your child from dying. You may find that you're extremely forgetful, because your mind is distracted and tired.

These feelings are all perfectly normal. The negative feelings don't make you a bad person. Lots of people feel guilty about their anger, but it's OK to be angry and to question why. There may be questions that will never be answered. Hopefully you'll be able to set those questions aside and accept the answers that are there for you.

Your grief might feel chaotic and out of control, but these feelings will eventually become less intense. After the initial gut wrenching grief that is so painful, there are generally four transitions through grief:

- Accepting that your loss is real
- Experiencing the pain of grief
- Adjusting to life without the person who has died
- Putting less emotional energy into grieving and putting it into something new

Some of these transitions will take longer than others, and there will be overlapping. When you're able to find a new passion and purpose, and a way to carry on your child's legacy, you'll find that coping with your loss will be easier.

Adapted by Chris Harder from an article entitled "The death of a loved one can be devastating."
(Bereaved Parents of the USA National Newsletter, Fall 2014)