



Community Hospice, Inc.
Support Services Department

December 30, 2014

Dear Friend:

Please accept our heartfelt sympathy on the death of your loved one. The first year after the death of a loved one can be extremely challenging and we believe that your needs continue long after your loss. We want to help.

Over the coming year, we will be mailing you literature about our Bereavement Services along with general information about grief and loss, unless you choose to decline this service. If you would like information about the special needs of children and teens during their time of grief, please let us know. Our staff will telephone you to discuss how we can best assist you during this difficult time. In the meantime, we've included a list of our active support groups and information on the grieving process.

A *Family Evaluation of Hospice Care* is enclosed for those who were primary caregivers for their deceased loved one. The information received from this survey will assist us better in serving you and other hospice patients and families. Please take a few moments to complete the form and return it in the enclosed postage paid envelope.

If you would like to talk about the loss of your loved one, your reactions or concerns, request a support group or individual support, please contact our Bereavement Specialist at 209.578.6378. If you reside outside of Stanislaus or San Joaquin Counties, we can provide you with hospice services/resources within your local community. We would like to keep in touch and welcome hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sue Garcia
Director of Support Services

Enclosures: 5

The First Stage of Grief
Common Reactions to Grief
Community Hospice Support Groups
Family Evaluation of Hospice Care
Postage Paid Return Envelope

The First Stage of Grief — Shock and Numbness

By Barbara L. Wiseman, M.D.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross listened, and learned about death from people who were dying. She described stages that people go through as they face death. Similarly, there are four common phases of grief as defined by John Bowlby and Collin Murray Parkes: 1) shock and numbness; 2) searching and yearning; 3) confusion, and; 4) a "new normal."

The length of time any phase lasts can vary greatly between individual. While shock often marks the beginning, and a "new normal" occurs with healing, a grieving person may move back and forth between different phases at any time. Grief often seems to come in waves of strong feeling. These waves of grief may be set in motion by a small thing that triggers a special memory — a song, a fragrance, or an unexpected comment. These times may be separated by periods where we just sit and stare or maybe even laugh strangely at odd times.

In this article, we will discuss the first phase of grief — shock and numbness. At first, only three phases were described, and it was not until 1974 that we understood that a brief, but important, first stage had been left out. Shock is especially present in any case of sudden and unexpected death. When a death is expected, as after a long illness, shock is more likely to occur at the time of diagnosis.

Shock then is that huge feeling of unreality we go through first ... the feeling that somehow this must all be a horrible dream. I believe shock and numbness begin with that sharp edge of fear when we something wrong in our doctor's voice, or it may be a policeman who is that voice of authority warning us that something is terribly wrong. We hold our breath and hope against hope. Then the reality comes, and the person we love so much is dead. Immediately we move into a place of stunned disbelief.

It is hard to focus on anything that is said after that point. This first part of grief is really difficult because we each have an idea how we think we will or should feel at this time. We expect that when someone we love dies, we will react with a huge outpouring of emotion. Actually, with a sudden death, we are far more likely to first feel bewilderment and shock.

Since we expect that we should feel overwhelming sadness, and instead we experience this numb sense of disbelief, we end up with confusion and guilt at our own lack of emotion. This is actually a time when the mind is trying to comprehend the overwhelming event, but is unable to accept the full impact of this harsh reality. It is common to reason things out at this point because the mind is aware of the facts, though this seems apart from our emotions.

Misunderstanding by caregivers at this stage can compound the problem as they may think the bereaved are unaware of or unclear about the seriousness of the situation.



Community Hospice, Inc.
Support Services Department
A United Way Partner Agency

People may also sob uncontrollably, which can even be frightening to medical staff and that is usually when people are offered sedation. Often, also during shock, people may respond with routine behaviors, at least temporarily, as if nothing has happened. They can continue to function in an unfeeling mechanical way. Some of those around them may feel this is being superhuman or "getting on with their lives," while others may question the lack of emotion. Worse, this phase often occurs during the time of the funeral, which adds to the confusion. But it is actually because of this feeling of unreality that they are able to function at all.

Since this phase of grief may last about two to four weeks, many people have already had to return to work, and they struggle with problems concentrating. The shock phase is marked by the difficulty of concentration and problems making decisions. Many decisions need to be made about issues like autopsies, organ donation, funeral arrangements and burial plots. These are difficult and stressful decisions for anyone. Decisions will impact how that special person will be remembered. If the death is sudden or it happens to a young person, these areas have rarely been considered ahead of time. Few people even know how to begin, let alone deal with details.

The inability to concentrate also leaves the griever with empty time on their hands. It is nearly impossible to read a book, watch a movie, or even work when one cannot concentrate. Our thoughts are intensely focused on the loved person and constantly replay the events around the time of death. Television seems annoying, hobbies seem pointless. These gaps of time become difficult to fill. The inability to concentrate is also a problem also because it becomes difficult to respond or be aware of personal needs.

During this time, many people find that it is helpful not to be alone but asking for help seems very difficult. It is extremely important for us to become aware of this phase of shock and numbness and to understand that people go through this state at different rates.

Great harm can occur to family relationships when they interpret lack of emotion as lack of caring. Actually, the stronger the grief, the greater the shock a person may experience. We need to recognize the shock stage in ourselves and others to avoid the unhelpful guilt that can occur.

The shock and numbness stage of grief must be understood to be real and normal. Allowing these feelings will lessen fear and keep families from being critical and distant during a time when they may most need each other.

Adapted with permission from Bereavement Magazine., July/August 1998)



Community Hospice, Inc.
Support Services Department
A United Way Partner Agency

Common Reactions to Grief

Physical Sensations

Tightness in chest
Over-sensitivity
Dryness of mouth
Shortness of breath
Muscle weakness
Lack of energy

Thoughts

Disbelief
Confusion
Constant thoughts and
memories of the deceased

Behaviors

Forgetfulness
Social withdrawal (isolation)
Change in sleep habits
Restlessness
Appetite changes
Visiting places that are reminders
Calling out for the deceased

Feelings

Sadness
Anger
Guilt
Worry
Helplessness
Shock
Longing
Relief

In time the physical sensations, feelings, thoughts and behaviors
will begin to balance out until one's rhythm is found.

"Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy" 2nd ED.



SUPPORT GROUPS FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE

Many people have little information about the grieving process and are not prepared for the long journey it requires.

Community Hospice offers several support groups available to community members who have suffered a loss.

Please contact our Bereavement Specialist at 209.578.6378 if you are interested in attending a support group or have any questions.

Pre-registration is required.

General Grief (evening)

Loss of significant other, friend, or family member other than spouse

Grief Education/Support

Grief information, individual grief support, call 209.578.6378 for appointment

Loss (2 day groups available)

Loss of Spouse

SOS (evening)

Survivors of suicide

Bereaved Parents (evening)

Loss of child

HUG Support (evening)

Children's group

* There are two HUG groups -- ages 7-9 and ages 10-12

TAG Support (evening)

Teen group for ages 13-17

Caregiver Support (evening)

For persons providing care and assistance to individuals who are disabled, or need help with activities of daily living

Grief Support groups are designed to help survivors:

- Increase understanding of the grief process.
- Recognize the normal manifestations and experiences and feelings of grief.
- Recognize, express and accept feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, and relief.
- Decrease emotional pain (sadness, depression, anxiety, loneliness, hopelessness).
- Develop a support system both with and without the group.
- Recognize signs of healing.
- Accept the reality and irreversibility of death of our loved one.
- Develop a realistic memory of our deceased, remembering the life shared, not primarily the death.
- Recognize our own strengths and weaknesses and seek additional support or therapy as needed.
- Reinvest ourselves in life by establishing "new" or renewed relationships and interests.