

# Anticipatory Grief

Loss is a part of everyone's life. In some cases, you know that a loved one (family member or friend) is ill or may be dying. You may begin to feel the effects of grief before a death actually occurs, especially if you know that the death of your loved one is near. It is normal to have strong feelings that are related to the illness or impending death of a loved one. Each person reacts in his or her own way.

## Here are some common symptoms of anticipatory grief:

- Feelings of guilt
- Tearfulness
- Constant changes in emotions
- Anger
- Depression
- Feelings of emotional numbness
- Anxiety or feelings of fear
- Changes in sleeping and eating habits
- Poor concentration
- Forgetfulness or poor memory
- Loneliness
- Denial
- Acceptance
- Fatigue

## What can you do to help yourself?

### Self-Expression:

- **Talk** – You have a lot of feelings going on within you right now. Talking is a way to help you heal your hurting emotions. You might find that some people discourage you or even give you a hard time for having strong emotional reactions. Gently remind them that this is helping you get through a rough time. If you don't feel comfortable doing that, find someone that you feel comfortable confiding in, like a coach, teacher, or guidance counselor.
- **Write** – Some people find it useful to write in a journal. Others find it helpful to write down their thoughts on a piece of paper, then throw it away. You might even want to compose a letter to the person who is dying, even if you never send it to them.
- **Create** – You might want to create a collage, scrapbook, poem, or other memento for your loved one. Again, this might be something you want to give to your loved one, or you might just want to keep it for yourself.
- **Remember** – Reflect on the good times that you've had with your loved one. What was special about the person? What moments do you cherish the most? Do things to honor your loved one. If they loved music, you might want to put together a CD or tape of their favorite songs.

## Physical Well-Being:

- **Get Enough Sleep** – Getting a good night's sleep every night will help you function better during the day. It will also help you to be able to deal with frustrations and other emotions that you might be feeling. Remember that sleep can be made difficult by caffeine, medications, heavy smoking and alcohol. If you are having difficulties sleeping, your guidance counselor or school psychologist may have some suggestions that will help you get a better night's sleep.
- **Avoid Chemicals** – Though you may crave chemicals to get you through this rough time, it's best to stay clear of substances like alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, and other drugs, because their side effects can be unhelpful in the long term.
- **Exercise Regularly** – You may feel tired and have a lack of energy. If you are able, take a brisk walk when you get home from school. Exercise is a good way to relieve tension, help you cope with emotions, and can even help you sleep.
- **Eat well** – Even if food is the furthest thing from your mind, pay attention to what you are eating. Foods that are high in fat, sugar, and processed carbohydrates (like white flour) can make you feel sluggish and can even decrease your energy.

## Emotional Well-Being:

- **Have Fun** – To many people, it doesn't "seem right" to be having fun when you know that a loved one is sick or dying. But remember that it is important for you to treat yourself well. Watch a movie, go to a sporting event at school, or hang out with your friends.... Whatever brings you enjoyment!
- **Forgive** – The impending death of someone you love brings with it the opportunity to communicate. You may feel the need to forgive that person for a past hurt. This can be the perfect time to talk to them about it. Also, you might feel the need to forgive yourself. Throughout this ordeal, you may have felt embarrassed, guilty, or angry, which are all normal reactions. Don't make yourself feel bad for these emotions. Recognize that they are a normal part of the process.
- **Plan Ahead** – Make yourself aware of the grieving process. It helps to know what you might be going through in the future so that there are no surprises. You might even experience feelings of grief on holidays or special dates that remind you of your loved one (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.).
- **Get Support** – There are lots of people who want to help you get through this difficult time – friends, family members, teachers, counselors, etc. Sometimes people want to help, but don't quite know what to do. It's important to have an outlet for sharing grief, even for people who aren't normally comfortable in talking about their feelings.