



## WHEN DOES GRIEF END?

Many grievers ask: “*When will I be done grieving?*” “*Shouldn’t I be over this by now?*” “*How long is this going to take?*”

### **Most of us just don’t know what to expect when we are grieving**

Weeks and months after a death, grievers are often bewildered that their pain continues with such intensity. They sometimes feel embarrassed that they are *still* focusing so much on their grief. Society’s expectations that someone should be “over it” and “moving on” don’t help. People’s comments like “*Why are you still so sad?*” or “*Come on, it’s time to move forward*” make us think that we must be grieving wrong and for too long.

### **Grief ebbs and flows**

At OUR HOUSE, we do not expect that someone will be “done” grieving at some definitive point in time. Rather, we know that grief is a life-long process with peaks and valleys. While your pain will not always be as raw and constant as it was in the beginning, there will be times throughout your life when your grief will be quite intense. So you have to take really good care of yourself, talk with people you trust, feel your feelings, and be gentle with yourself. Give yourself permission to cry *and* laugh, to remember the joy *and* acknowledge the pain, and trust that healing is happening even when it doesn’t seem like it.

### **Your heart is not on a time schedule**

There is no magical time when your grief will change. And it won’t help to rush it. However you can predict that after two months or so have passed, you will probably find yourself beginning to come out of the numbness and shock that has surrounded you since the death occurred. It is common to hear people say they feel like they have been living in a bubble, that life seems surreal. Just when you thought you should be starting to feel significantly better, it can be shocking to discover that without nature’s anesthesia, the pain of facing the reality of the death actually intensifies.

As you approach the marking of the year since your loved one dies, you may feel yourself re-living in your mind all that happened on those dates last year. Even if you are not consciously aware of the date, you may find that you are having emotional reactions. Some years may be easier and others more intense. Be gentle with yourself. Consider spending some time with family or friends, as well as allowing for some private time alone. Making a plan and an alternate back-up plan will give you the flexibility to see how you feel when the day arrives.

### **Important milestones**

Your loved one may be especially missed as you encounter important “firsts”, either on your personal calendar, or on the “regular” calendar. Give some thought in advance as to how you will spend those days now and which traditions you will keep, modify, or do without this year. Perhaps there are new traditions you would like to create that would have special meaning for you now.

Over the course of your lifetime, there will be those significant life passages when you will yearn for the person who died to be with you, or to know of what is happening in your world. Finding a way to include their memory in some significant way as these milestone events occur will help you maintain a healthy connection to those who have died.

## **Grief is a process**

Here are some realistic expectations for your grief as time goes by:

- It takes time for healing to happen. Although the pain of grief often comes upon us all at once in a crushing blow, the pain gradually lessens over time.
- You will find relief through expressing your feelings even many months and years after the death
- You cannot get through this alone, so find ways to seek out support
- The camaraderie and understanding of others in a grief support group will help to normalize your feelings
- It helps to continue to honor and maintain a loving connection to the memory of the person who died
- There will come a time when you will go for an hour, a day, or a week without crying
- When you are hit by a tidal wave of emotions, the duration will gradually diminish
- There will be more time between those tidal waves
- You will be able to talk about your loved one without feeling an overwhelming sadness
- You find yourself laughing or enjoying yourself
- You are able to smile as you think of tender memories
- You find yourself wanting to spend time with others
- You begin to once again engage in activities that gave you pleasure in the past
- You develop new interests
- You begin to see and feel a possibility of hope for a meaningful life ahead

OUR HOUSE Grief Support Center

[www.OurHouse-Grief.org](http://www.OurHouse-Grief.org)