

HELPING YOUR FAMILY COPE WITH THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

The grieving process within a family can be painful and difficult, and each family member will grieve in his/her own unique way. Some family members might want to talk frequently about the deceased loved one and others might want to avoid talking about the loss. Some family members might want to be very involved in the planning of funeral arrangements and others may not. It can be challenging to understand the varying needs of your family members, but there are ways to overcome differences and support one another through the grieving process.

Here is a list of ways to help your family grieve the loss in healthy ways:

1. Respect one another's preferences regarding the grieving process while respecting your own preferences at the same time. For example, if it is too painful for your sibling to discuss the death of your mother, turn to your husband or friend instead. Let your family members grieve at their own pace.
2. As a family, create a collage of pictures of your deceased loved one. This collage can be displayed during the funeral or memorial service, or simply displayed at home.
3. Do a "feelings check" with your family members, especially if your family includes children. Ask everyone to list all of the feelings that they would associate with losing their loved one (e.g. shock, sadness, anger, etc.). You should list your feelings as well. The goal should not be to "fix" anyone's feelings, but to validate them. Let your family members know that you understand why they might feel that way.
4. Ask your family members what you can do to help them or to show support, and tell them what you need to feel comforted and supported. Don't expect yourself or your family members to be mind readers.
5. Participate in an activity together such as taking a walk, playing a board game, or listening to music. It is not healthy to spend 24 hours a day grieving or feeling distraught. Give yourself and your family permission to laugh and do fun activities.
6. Create a "memory box" as a family using a photo box or storage bin. Allow family members to use this box to store memories or keepsakes associated with the deceased loved one such as pictures, tickets to special events, cards and letters, etc.
7. Encourage your family members to talk about the things that they are grateful for or things that they appreciate about your family. Every family argues and experiences conflict, but every family also has its strengths and positive qualities.

For more information on grief and loss or to obtain support for yourself or a loved one, please contact:

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