



HOSPICE

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## GRIEF AND SELF CARE

One of the more trying aspects of grief are the ways in which it manifests in the body. Often primary bereaved deal with the exhaustion of supporting a loved one through a long term illness followed by a lack of rest as you organize funerary services, coordinate family travel and hosting guests in your home. All of these things contribute to a compromised immune system. This in turn makes it more difficult to cope with everyday concerns in addition to grief issues.

### SOME SIMPLE SUGGESTIONS

The average length of bereavement leave in America is three days. However, the grief process can last for many months. A major difficulty for many bereaved is the social expectation of returning to responsibilities even though you really are not done grieving.

There can be a benefit to taking care of responsibilities. It provides a temporary distraction from the emotional upheaval and can create a feeling of accomplishment. However, sometimes the expectations of friends and family can be unrealistic and add to the difficulty we are experiencing.

This handout includes some simple suggestions on self care as you begin to take up unavoidable responsibilities of life.

#### GET SOME REST

When grieving, it is very common to experience difficulty with clear thinking, concentration and memory. Lack of sleep makes these pre-existing symptoms worse. In the early stages of bereavement disrupted sleep is common. The tension of anticipating a death, the interruption in your regular schedule, and the many activities associated with the death of a loved one all contributes to poor sleep. Try to maintain regular sleep patterns. Keep a journal, book, music or other activities you can do in bed during periods of insomnia. However, if you are still unable to get adequate rest a couple of months after the death, consider speaking with your physician. There are sleep aids available that do not carry risks of dependency, and you may be able to discontinue use once your sleep pattern is restored.

#### PRACTICE THE WORD "NO" WHEN NECESSARY

This can be much more difficult than we think, particularly for many women. People often fear the possibility of disappointing others or of being judged by others. Are you on boards or committees for work, school, or church? If these activities do not enhance your life right now, step down from them or request a leave of absence for a period of a few months. Generally you will find that your community is supportive and you can almost always reevaluate your participation at a later date.





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## GRIEF AND SELF CARE (CONTINUED)

### SEEK SUPPORT

Support groups are not for everyone and are generally not recommended for the early stages of acute grief. However, there are many real benefits to seeking out support and self help groups. Being with others going through the same thing can reduce a sense of isolation. It can be validating to hear others share similar feelings and experiences. Groups share resources, information, coping skills, and give bereaved people a chance to share uncomfortable feelings such as relief, guilt, or anger in a supportive environment. On a more basic level, it can be a place to go and provide some structure to life at a time when everything feels like chaos. Things to look for in a support group include the time of day, frequency, and location of meetings. Is the group facilitated and if so, what are facilitators' credentials? Who sponsors the group? Does the group require a period of commitment or is it offered on a "drop-in" basis? Are any fees required?

Enclosed you will find a list of support groups in the Portland metro area. If you do not see what you're looking for in this list or have additional questions, please contact the Signature Hospice Bereavement Coordinator at **866.306.4279 ext. 8662**.

### PRACTICE THE WORD "YES" WHEN NECESSARY

If you have friends or family members who are offering to help you, say "Yes!" Keep an ongoing list of items that you need help with. If a friend offers to make dinner, go shopping, or pick your child up from an after school event, let them. This relieves you of some responsibility, and gives your loved ones the opportunity to do something for you. Many bereaved people express a fear of being a "burden" but think for a moment: If your friend was grieving, would you see helping as a burden or be relieved at a chance to actively "do" something to show you care?

### ADJUST YOUR EXPECTATIONS

You may or may not have the energy to maintain the activity and the energy level you have normally. Everyone is different. For some people getting out and doing is the solution to grief. For others, they need retreat, introspection and solitude. Make allowances for what you're dealing with. If you can afford it, take a mental health day from work now and then for a few months. If you can't afford time off work, find other ways to rejuvenate yourself. Indulge in simple activities that give you pleasure or even just relief. Prioritize. Figure out what basic life maintenance means to you and when you have bursts of energy take care of extra things.

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