



YOU'RE NOT CRAZY, YOU'RE JUST GRIEVING

Grief is hard. Living through the loss of a loved one can be an exhausting, miserable, lonely, terrifying experience. Whether or not our loss was expected, the effects of grief on the mind, body and spirit can be very disorienting.

More than once, when speaking to a bereaved person I have heard them say "I feel like I'm going crazy."

I JUST CAN'T GET IT TOGETHER!

During this time it is very common to experience forgetfulness, have a hard time concentrating or feel "fuzzy". Emotions can be extreme, or be "numbed". You may find yourself suddenly angry in settings you previously enjoyed. You may feel as though everything is fine and then suddenly find yourself crying, laughing, angry or giddy for no apparent reason. You may find yourself overwhelmed by seemingly simple daily tasks like laundry or grocery shopping.

Grief is a psychological process that the medical community recognizes as necessary to allow our mind to adjust to the loss of the person who died. It is common for healthy people to form attachments, or relationships with other people. Relationships can include family of birth, family of choice, and friends that may as well be family. When someone that we are in a relationship with dies, we are separated from them on many levels. There are things that our mind does to protect itself from the pain of being separated from someone we're attached to. Our brain tries **very** hard to find the person that is missing. It is common to:

- See the person who died and return to places where they spent time
- Hear the voice of the deceased
- Repeatedly "forget" that he or she has died

To some degree, our brain is trying very hard to deny death. Initially, this denial is useful. It gives us time to adjust to the idea that the loss is real and acts as an "emotional buffer".



- Talk to the person who died



YOU'RE NOT CRAZY, YOU'RE JUST GRIEVING (CONTINUED)

CONNECT WITH OTHER GRIEVERS

This provides mutual support and validation and reduces the sense of isolation bereaved persons often experience. Even in a room full of people you can feel very alone. By spending time with others who grieve, you mutually validate each other's experience. You can learn coping skills from each other and seeing people who have survived their loss is a reminder that you can do the same. Support groups are often found at senior centers, hospitals, community centers, churches and many other places. Signature Hospice has a list of grief support groups available, including our own.

These are a few books that may be useful to you in coping with significant moments in the year:

- *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies*, Therese Rando
- *A Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion
- *A Decembered Grief*, Harold Ivan Smith
- *Unplug the Christmas Machine*, Jo Robinson and Jean Coppock-Staeheli

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

First of all, accept that moments of "craziness" (also called "griefbursts") will happen. Come up with strategies to address these events so that when they happen, you are prepared.

- Keep comfort objects such as a photograph in your pocket or a shirt in your car, sometimes just being able to touch a comforting object can be soothing.
- Ask for help in advance. Pick a friend or two and ask if you can call them when you get caught by surprise emotionally.

- If you are suddenly overwhelmed at work or in public and unable to leave, excuse yourself and go to the restroom, or your car. Turn to a co-worker you are close to if possible.
- If tasks are overwhelming, ask a friend to help or try to prioritize and focus on only the most important task.
- As hard as it may be, do your best to reach out to those you know will listen.

Most important, simply give yourself a break and do your best to ride the roller coaster. Rest when you can, even if it means a nap in the middle of the day or going to bed right after work. Be prepared for nights you can't sleep. Keep a favorite DVD or book on hand, or a journal. If you find yourself unable to function because of your grief, do seek professional support.

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