

# The Grieving Process

When we experience a major loss, grief is the normal and natural way our mind and body react. Everyone grieves differently. And at the same time there are common patterns people tend to share. For example, someone experiencing grief usually moves through a series of emotional stages, such as shock, numbness, guilt, anger and denial. And physical responses are typical also. They can include: sleeplessness, inability to eat or concentrate, lack of energy, and lack of interest in activities previously enjoyed.

Time always plays an important role in the grieving process. As the days, weeks and months go by, the person who is experiencing loss moves through emotional and physical reactions that normally lead toward acceptance, healing and getting on with life as fully as possible.

Sometimes a person can become overwhelmed or bogged down in the grieving process. Serious losses are never easy to deal with, but someone who is having trouble beginning to actively re-engage in life after a few months should consider getting professional help. For example, if continual depression or physical symptoms such as loss of appetite, inability to sleep, or chronic lack of energy persists, it is probably time to see a doctor.

## Accepting a Loss

For each of us - rich or poor, young or old - there are times in our lives when we must face and deal with personal losses and the pain and sorrow they cause. Examples that come easily to mind are the death of a parent, spouse, child, or other close family member or friend. Many other events and transitions also bring with them sadness and a need to grieve, like:

- Being told you have a serious, possibly terminal illness.
- Having to give up interests and activities that have been a major part of your life.
- Seeing serious decline in mental or physical health of someone you love.
- Retiring from a work career or voluntary activity that has helped shape who you are and what you stand for.
- Losing a significant part of your independence and mobility; even giving up driving a car can be a significant loss for many people.
- Moving out of your home.
- Saying goodbye to a favorite pet.

Losses such as these are simply part of living. Like their counterparts among the joyful occasions in our lifetime - the birth of a child or grandchild, a celebration of marriage, an enduring friendship - they are part of what it means to share in the human experience. And the emotions they create in us are part of living, as well.