



UNITED  
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

# Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

November 2008

## Grief: Surviving the Feelings and Healing the Heart

What can be more difficult than experiencing the loss of someone close to you? Eventually, we all must face the loss of a family member, close friend, or even a pet. Though grief is a natural part of life, most of are not prepared to understand and cope with the feelings.

While there this no magic formula for dealing with grief, it's helpful to learn what feelings and behaviors are within the wide range of "normal," and what you can do to make the process of grieving just a little more bearable.

### How We Respond to Loss

There are five recognized stages of grief: 1) denial and isolation, 2) anger, 3)

bargaining, 4) depression, and 5) acceptance.

Behavioral health experts agree that most people experience all these stages at some point, though the stages are not necessarily experienced in order. (Also, some people skip stages and still recover successfully.)

The following are some normal responses to the death of a loved one:

### Shock and numbness.

Have you ever known someone who lost a loved one and seemed not to react? Sometimes the loss is such a shock that the mind blocks feelings of grief. Shock and numbness can cause fierce denial. Individuals may experience periods of shock, on and off, for up to a year or more.

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## When to Seek Professional Help

Talking with a professional counselor can be a vital part of healing. A counselor can provide a safe place to express feelings, and can help you develop skills for coping with sadness. It's especially important to seek professional help when feelings of loss go beyond the ranges of "normal." Be sure get help if you experience:

- Thoughts of suicide
- Extended periods of loss of appetite or sleep
- Extended periods of confusion
- An inability to care for oneself
- Continued isolation
- Periods of depression
- Inability to function normally

If you or someone you know needs help dealing with loss, UBH is here. Call or log on today.

## Upcoming Articles

December 2008

Forget New Year's Resolutions!  
Make Life-Changing Decisions

January 2009

Credit Card Debt



**Pain and sadness.** The most common reaction to death is sadness and an overwhelming sense of loss. While some are able to express their sadness by crying or talking, others feel a need to keep feelings under control. Releasing sadness is an important step toward healing.

**Disorientation.** When a person is grieving, sometimes ordinary tasks become extremely difficult. Despair, anxiety and disorganization can make it almost impossible to do even the simplest things.

**Anger.** Anger at the unfairness of life, anger at the person who is gone, anger at the world, and anger at a “higher power” are all common reactions to loss. Why did this happen to me? Why was my child taken? Why can’t I grow old with my spouse? Of course, none of these questions have answers, but even the most emotionally stable and spiritual people are plagued by the “why” of the loss.

**Guilt.** Sometimes people wonder why they were spared, or feel guilty that

they can go on living. As the grieving process continues, and the person left behind emotionally detaches from the deceased, there may be even deeper guilt at feeling better or investing in new relationships.

Of course, we all heal in different ways. There is no “correct” way to recover from a loss. Though grieving is a deeply personal experience, it may provide comfort to know that a range of feelings is normal, and that you are not alone.

If you are struggling with a loss, reach out for support. Asking for help is never a sign of weakness or failure, especially in situations too difficult to handle alone. UBH is here to help. Call or log on anytime for help with any of life’s challenges.



## The Healing Process

Like it or not, grieving is a process that each person must go through. But there are ways to ease some of the emotional pain.

For many, it helps to participate in social and cultural rituals. Don’t avoid funerals, memorial services, or whatever ritual is accepted within your own culture. These offer the opportunity to express sadness, give others the opening to provide comfort, and help us to realize we are not alone in our sadness.

Likewise, stay close to others. The support of friends and family members is vital to healing. Avoid isolating yourself. Instead, participate in gatherings and events with people you care about.

It may also help to find a support group. At some point, you might feel you are burdening others with your grief. Grief support groups offer ongoing help within a safe environment where people can express a range of emotions. For



many, support groups are a key to dealing with grief in a healthy way.

## Resources

### United Behavioral Health

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.

[www.liveandworkwell.com](http://www.liveandworkwell.com)

Use the search phrase “loss and grief” for information about helping your child deal with death.

The information and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for educational purposes only and are not meant to be used in place of professional clinical consultations for individual health needs. Certain treatments may not be covered in some benefit plans. Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services.