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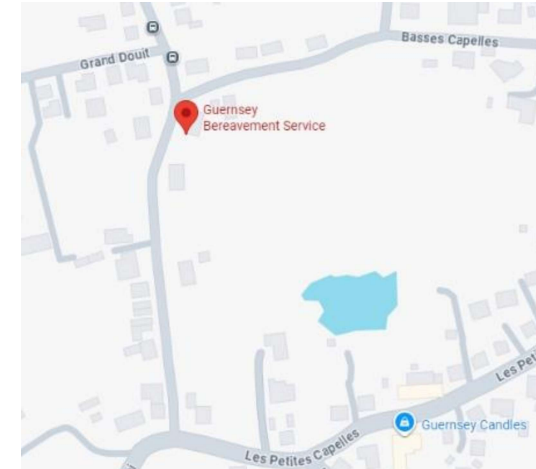
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Anticipatory Grief

What is anticipatory grief?

Anticipatory grief is defined as grief that occurs before death. It can be like grief after death, but is also unique in many ways. This type of grief includes many losses - such as the loss of a companion, changing roles in the family, fear of financial changes, and the loss of dreams of what could be. It begins when a life-threatening illness is diagnosed, or a terminal prognosis is given; we understand that there is no cure, and we realize that death is likely or inevitable. Anticipatory grief is the deep sadness that is often felt during the last days of life. It can be experienced both by the loved ones of someone who is nearing death as well as the person who is dying.

Grief before death may involve more anger, more loss of emotional control, and more unusual grief responses. This may be related to the difficult place - the in-between place people find themselves in - when a loved one is dying. Not everyone experiences anticipatory grief. It is neither good nor bad to do so. Some people experience very little grief while a loved one is dying, and in fact find they don't allow themselves to grieve because it might be construed as giving up hope. Yet for some people, the grief before the actual loss is even more severe. There can be mixed feelings as you find yourself in that delicate place of maintaining hope, while at the same time beginning to let go. Not only are these emotions deeply painful, but people are often less likely to receive support for their grief at this time, and sometimes grieving before death may even be misconstrued as giving up.



Other Help Available

Family Doctor

The Samaritans (Tel 715515)

The Sunflower Project (Tel 724421)
(Children's Bereavement Charity)

Winston's Wish - <https://winstonswish.org/>

Citizens Advice Bureau (Tel 242266)

The Guernsey Bereavement Service is a voluntary, confidential, low-cost counselling service available for adults in the Bailiwick of Guernsey experiencing any type of loss.

We provide emotional support for any adult struggling to come to terms with loss, whether this is a bereavement, relationship, pet, career or role, or any other type of loss. We give you the opportunity to talk through issues in a non-judgemental and safe atmosphere.

Contact Details

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GY2 4WE
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Can anticipatory grief help the grieving process later on?

Grief before death isn't a substitute for grief later on and won't necessarily shorten the grieving process. Even if your loved one's health has been declining for a long time, nothing can really prepare you for the actual death. Yet, while anticipatory grieving isn't a substitute for later grieving, it does give you opportunities for closure that people who lose loved ones suddenly never have.

Anticipatory grief is a normal process in the continuum of grief, but in some cases this grief can be so intense that it interferes with your ability to cope. It's also common for people to develop depression when faced with all the losses surrounding grief. Seek help from a professional if you find yourself having difficulty coping.

If there are some things you would prefer to discuss with someone outside the family, talk with a pastoral counsellor, spiritual advisor, GP or trained bereavement volunteer. Find someone you trust who will not judge you and who will listen to whatever thoughts and feelings you may need to explore.

Symptoms

The emotions that accompany anticipatory grief are like those after a loss, but can be even more like a roller coaster at times. Some days may be really hard. Other days you may not experience grief at all. Listed are some of the typical emotions, but keep in mind that everyone grieves differently.

- ***Sadness and tearfulness.***
- ***Fear*** - Including not just the fear of death, but fear about all the changes that will be associated with losing your loved one.
- ***Irritability and anger*** - You may experience anger yourself, but it can also be difficult to deal with another's anger
- ***Loneliness*** - A sense of intense loneliness is often experienced by the close family of someone who is dying. The feeling that it's not socially acceptable to express anticipatory grief can add to feelings of isolation.
- ***Desire to talk*** - Loneliness can result in a strong desire to talk to someone, anyone, who might understand how you feel and listen without judgment. If you don't have a safe place to express your grief, these emotions can lead to withdrawal or emotional numbness to protect the pain in your heart.

Practice good self-care. Pay attention to your family's needs for adequate rest, nutrition, recreation and fun. In your efforts to remain strong and care for the dying person, don't let your own physical, emotional and spiritual needs, or the needs of other family members (especially children), get lost or neglected.

Practice Forgiveness. Forgiveness is healing, and learning to forgive yourself is just as important as forgiving others. The time before death is filled with emotions, and anger and resentment among family members can reign strong. But this is also a time to resolve differences. A good first step in forgiveness is listening; so often people are ultimately saying the same thing - just in different ways. Yet sometimes there are clear differences. A question you can ask yourself if you are irritated with another family member is, "is it more important to love or to be right?" As the saying goes, resentment is a poison you prepare for another and drink yourself. To let go of resentment and hurt from the past is freeing. Give yourself the gift of forgiveness.

Give Your Loved One Permission to Die. It's not uncommon for someone to hang on until some specific time - for example, waiting until they hit a date such as the graduation of a child, a birthday, or a visit from a loved one. For some people, it appears as if they finally allow themselves to take their last breath after a loved one says goodbye in some way, and in doing so, grants permission. Permission to die can go both ways.

Remember that this time for warmth, sharing and togetherness will not come again. Although communication may be frustrating and painful, now is the time to clear up unresolved issues and to say, do and share what is especially cherished and significant. Expect changes in the ways family members interact with one another. Maintaining some of the normal family routines will help to provide security in the midst of all the chaos.

Do what you can to help the dying person complete end-of-life tasks (last will and testament, distribution of possessions, funeral preparation, gathering and safeguarding important documents such as medical, legal, and family papers).

Embrace and express your spiritual beliefs, if faith is important to you and your family. Spirituality may take the form of organized religion and prayer, meditation, communing with nature, or even listening to music that is meaningful to you. Studies have shown that people who are dying experience a better quality of life in the last days if they have an active spiritual life, and that spiritual life has benefits for more than the person dying. Recognize that, under these circumstances, it is not at all unusual to feel angry at the doctors, at the one who is dying, or at God for the injustice of it all.

- ***Anxiety*** - having a loved one who is dying is like living in a state of heightened anxiety all the time. Anxiety in turn can cause physical symptoms such as tremulousness and shaking.
- ***Guilt*** - For some people the time prior to a loved one's death can be a time of great guilt - especially if your loved one is suffering. While you long for your loved one to be free of pain, you fear the moment that death will actually happen. You may also be experiencing guilt - a guilt that you will be able to continue with your life while someone else will not.
- ***Rehearsal of the death*** - You may find yourself visualizing what it will be like to have your loved one gone. Or if you are dying, visualizing how your loved ones will carry on after your death.
- ***Physical problems*** - Such as sleep difficulty and memory problems.

Coping

It's important to express your pain and let yourself grieve. Finding a friend or another loved one you can share your feelings openly with is extremely helpful. Keep in mind that letting go doesn't mean you have to stop loving the person - even after they die. During this stage, some people begin to find a safe place in their heart to hold memories of their loved one that will never go away.

It is normal, especially in the beginning, to feel shocked, dismayed, helpless and numb, especially if the onset of the illness is sudden or unexpected. You need time to take in this most unwelcome news, at a pace that suits you.

Follow the lead of the person who is dying, they are a unique individual experiencing their illness in a personal way, and will choose whether to openly discuss the illness and impending death.

Encourage - but do not force - honest communication among family members, friends, and the one who is dying. Recognize and respect the fact that some individuals may be unable or unwilling to talk about the illness and its probable course. It is natural to take in a terminal diagnosis gradually, as facing it all at once is overwhelming. Listen without judging, allowing others to express their thoughts and feelings about the illness without fear of criticism. Let others know how you are feeling and what you need.

Be honest and open with children involved. Help in communicating appropriately can be obtained through Winston's Wish.

Spend time together. People often talk about how difficult it is to spend time with their loved one who is dying. They don't want to remember their loved one the way they are now, but instead, how they were before they were dying. But spending time is important not only for the person dying, but for close loved ones as well.

Consider Journaling. Many people find that keeping a journal or diary to note down their thoughts and feelings is very healing. It can be a place to record special thoughts around the time of your loved one's death - thoughts that you may later wish you had recorded.

Instead of, or in addition to, journaling, some people find writing letters helps with the sorrow of an impending death. For example, you could write a letter to your dying loved one saying everything you want to make sure you would say. If you are dying, writing letters to your children - perhaps letters they can open at a later date - provides a place to express those tender emotions and at the same time grant those who remain behind a tremendous gift.

Maintain a Sense of Humour. There's not a lot of room for comedy when someone is dying, and there is clearly a time for sorrow. But sometimes humour, in the right setting, can be healing.