



Bill of Rights for Those in Grief

Support and Care for those with Terminal Illness

Each person grieves in his or her own way; there is no right or wrong. Along the way, you may encounter people trying to help. This "bill of rights" is something for you to consider in determining what is and is not helpful to you.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to experience your own unique grief. No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. No one else can tell you what you should or should not be feeling.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to talk about your grief. Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want, and as often as you want, about your grief. There is no time limit on traveling the path of grief.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to feel a multitude of emotions. Confusion, disorientation, fear, anger, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. All of your feelings are valuable and deserve attention. Choose to be around people who will allow you to share them unconditionally and without judging them to be right or wrong, good or bad.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you fatigued and drained. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. Do only what you feel ready for and don't be pressured by others to do things you don't want to do.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to experience grief "attacks." Sometimes, out of nowhere, a power surge of grief may overwhelm you. This can be frightening, but is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to make use of ritual. Look for ways to memorialize events such as anniversaries, birthdays and holidays. Ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. Ritual is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you that rituals are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to embrace your spirituality. If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to treasure your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.



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YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to search for meaning. You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some questions may have answers, but some may not. Watch out for clichéd responses that some people may give you. Comments like, "it was God's will" or "think of what you have to be thankful for" are not always helpful and you do not have to accept them.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to move toward your grief and heal. Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember that grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself; avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you are required to forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT to laugh and be happy again. As you continue to journey through grief, and heal some of the pain that death has brought, your spirit may become lighter and you may find your sense of humor again and find joy in your surroundings. Celebrate these moments!

- Adapted from 'The Grieving Person's Bill of Rights' by Alan Wolfelt

Hospice of Spokane offers bereavement resources at no charge to our community. Gathering with others who are journeying through grief is comforting and informative for many people. Our grief support groups and counseling focus on several types of grief and are available throughout the week. Special programs for grieving children and parents are also offered at no cost.



What to Expect During Early Bereavement

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The grieving process is long and the length cannot be predicted. You may feel overwhelmed or simply numb. With time, these feelings become more tolerable.

- It is normal to experience periods of disbelief in addition to deep grief and longing. Your heart, mind and body are struggling to grasp the reality of what has happened.
- Not wanting to believe that the death has occurred and listening for the loved one to return, to call or for familiar sounds is not unusual. This is a normal phase experienced by many. It will pass as the reality of the loss is absorbed.
- Many people have feelings that are confusing and contradictory: sadness, anger, guilt, regret, fear and sometimes the absence of feelings entirely.
- In the early stage of bereavement concentrating, sitting quietly, watching TV, reading or even sleeping may be difficult.
- Many factors influence the course of bereavement: prior losses in the household, availability of emotional support or the amount of preparation the family had for the illness and death.
- It is not necessary to forget and “move on” to complete the mourning process. A strong but realistic continuing memory of the deceased is beneficial, especially for children.
- Some people cope well early in bereavement and are surprised to experience a greater sense of loss several months later.
- Bereavement can be like a roller coaster with ups and downs. Certain special anniversaries and memories can temporarily trigger deeper feelings of loss.
- Bereavement entails losses in many forms: For instance, losing a spouse not only means not having one’s life partner; it might also mean the loss of a co-parent, the person who shared the household duties, a best friend.
- Children may not appear to be grieving but they definitely mourn. Grief for them can be experienced in brief spurts interspersed with normal play and school activities.

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Coping Strategies Throughout Bereavement

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Find good listeners: Talk and tell your story again and again. Grief support groups are a natural setting. Call Hospice of Spokane at 509-456-0438 to learn more about current groups.

Get accurate information: Grief is confusing and overwhelming. We all work through it differently. It may be reassuring to share your feelings. Individual counseling may also be helpful.

Use the help that is available: Let neighbors, friends, coworkers and family help. This is an important time to regain a sense of belonging by keeping in touch with others.

Pay attention to your physical wellbeing: People can experience physical symptoms of grief that include eating and sleeping disturbances. Do not hesitate to see your physician.

Be physical if you are able: Walking, swimming, sit-and-be-fit exercises or other types of exercise are all healthy ways to offset the feelings of fatigue and lethargy. Make it a routine if you can.

Keep a balance: Allow some recreation or distraction if you can. You will need to get away from your feelings of loss even for short period of time.

Make use of self-calming mechanisms: Prayer, meditation, journal-writing or music can balance periods of unrest and melancholy.

Acknowledge your feelings whatever they are: Write letters to the deceased in times of loneliness or light a daily memorial candle in memory. Be creative.

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Memorial traditions are a healthy way to remember and honor our loved ones; traditions can be celebrated alone or with family and friends. They can take place during special holidays or any time that has meaning for you. The important thing is to take the time to intentionally focus on memories of the people that you have loved, but who are no longer with you. Below are some ideas that you may find useful.

- Anytime during the holidays, light a candle in memory of your loved one. Add a favorite photograph if desired.
- Offer a dinner prayer, meditation or toast to your loved one.
- Display a single fresh flower to celebrate the life of your loved one.
- Create a memory book with photos, mementos and journaling. It can sit on your coffee table to encourage friends and family to also remember.
- Give yourself permission to remember happy times and events.
- Create a special holiday decoration for loved ones who are no longer with you. Display it during the holidays to help you feel close to them.
- In the spring, plant a tree or bush in your yard or purchase a small plant to pot. Have a planting ceremony and on special occasions decorate the plant with objects that will help you remember special times.
- Bring joy to others through a favorite activity of your loved one. If they enjoyed gardening, take flowers to someone who may need them. If they liked to watch movies, enjoy a movie with someone who could use the company. If they loved cooking, share a meal with a friend. If they had a passion for music, bring some music to someone who could use cheering up. Share the reason for your activity with the people who benefit.
- Write a letter to your loved one on their birthday or an anniversary date. Share what has been happening since they have been gone. This can be stored and accumulated as the years go by, providing a comforting record.

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Children and Grief

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If someone close to you has died, this may be an important time to consider the children in your family or with whom you are acquainted who may also be affected by the loss. Children have different ways of grieving than adults and may struggle with their feelings of grief in less obvious ways. They may appear to misbehave or disobey. They may become more “controlling” or overly concerned about the well-being of surviving adults in their lives, rather than expressing grief directly with tears and words.

The loss of a parent frequently causes children distress they are not developmentally ready to handle. The surviving parent or other caregiver is faced with his or her own grief as well as the child’s needs.

The loss of a sibling may raise feelings of personal vulnerability, survivor guilt or other complex emotions.

Adolescents have the need to process grief with friends their own age, but may not have friends who are able to talk about loss.

Children are able to understand death at different levels, both the child’s age and the meaning of the lost relationship need to be considered. Children may also be resilient and able to feel supported by other caring adults in their life.

If a child has lost a significant relationship and needs support, Hospice of Spokane offers a special group for parents and kids as well as a summer grief camp for children. There is no charge for these groups and they are open to everyone in our community. Individual or family grief counseling is also available to the community.

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