

ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

“Anticipatory grief” is a form of grief that occurs when there is an opportunity to anticipate the death of someone (or oneself). It is similar to the normal process of mourning, but it occurs before the actual death (in anticipation of the death).

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The information in this handout is provided by Home Nursing Agency. It is our hope it will provide you with some support and comfort during a difficult time.

Anticipatory grief involves:

FEELINGS: sadness, fear, anger, anxiety, moodiness

THOUGHTS: worry, “What will happen to me?”, “How can I stop this?”, “It’s my fault.”

PHYSICAL SENSATIONS: headaches, stomachaches, muscle aches, nausea

These feelings happen when a loved one is terminally ill or nearing the end of natural life. These feelings can also be related to the fear of another loss after the death of a significant person, even if the loss is not likely to happen.

Anticipatory grief can be affected by such things as the duration and pattern of illness, concurrent stresses (financial, social, physical, developmental, etc.), periods of certainty and uncertainty, and varying support from others.

PHASES OF ANTICIPATORY GRIEF:

Grief and mourning do not have specified volumes or time restrictions, and each individual expresses his/her grief in his/her own way and time. Anticipatory grief MAY include the following phases, though not exclusively in this order:

Phase I: In this stage, an individual realizes that death is inevitable and there is no expectation for a cure. Sadness and depression are often associated with this first stage of grief.

Phase II: The next phase is concern for the dying person. Family members may regret arguments or disciplining of a dying child. (For a dying child, concern may be increased for him/herself and his/her own fears of death, or because of the emotions expressed by loved ones around him/her.

Phase III: In this phase, the actual death may be “rehearsed”. The physical process of death and what may happen after death are concerns in this phase. Funeral arrangements and saying “goodbye” to loved ones may occur as a result of some anticipatory grieving.

Phase IV: In the last phase, loved ones may be imagining what their lives are going to be like without the person who is dying. The dying person may think about life after death. They may also try to imagine what it will be like for his/her loved ones to live without him/her.

Anticipatory grief may not always occur. Anticipatory grief does not mean that before the death, a person feels the same kind of grief as the grief felt after a death. There is not a set amount of grief that a person will feel. The grief experience before a death does not make the grief after the death last a shorter amount of time.