

WHAT IS THIS EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER I AM ON?

Mary Ann Rosenbloom RN



Let's Take a Look at the Emotions

What is Grief?

A reaction to a loss of something to which we have an emotional attachment – marriage, home, job, pet and most commonly, a person/spouse

Why do we Grieve?

Normal reaction to loss

An attachment has been broken

Emotional need to express the hurt

We are grieving for ourselves – it's our loss

It can include fear of the future

If grief is a reaction to loss why are we talking about grief before our loved one has died?

The usual term we use is Anticipatory Grief –

Simply put, Anticipatory Grief is the form of grief that occurs when one is confronted with chronic or life threatening illness and one anticipates the loss of a loved one.

Ah...but it isn't that simple!

The emotions of grief are occurring along the way not just because of future events –

- You are experiencing a large number of losses along the way
- Companionship
- Support – financial and emotional
- Independence
- Future dreams and plans
- Faith
- Intimacy
- A good night's sleep

What are our reactions to grief?

- Sadness
- Anger - directed at loved one, doctors, family, self, God)
- Regret
- Confusion
- Depression
- Guilt (not caring well enough/can't save them)
- Physical complaints – weight loss/gain, chest pain, gastric upset

Grief reactions cont'd

- Resentment (at loved one's illness/health care/family)
- Helplessness
- Forgetfulness (oh no! not me too!)
- Denial

Each emotion is exhausting, we become fatigued by one let alone having multiple emotions which surface and recede and surface again.

Worst of all are anxiety and dread – what lies ahead in the course of this illness?

And now to compound the issues....

- ▣ Caregiver Burnout

 - Disengagement

 - Blunted emotions

 - Feelings of Hopelessness and Helplessness

 - Loss of motivation, ideals and hopes

 - Depression

 - Emotional damage

It all Started out with Some Hope

- ▣ Hope for a cure (perhaps even pushing us to seek new treatments)
- ▣ Hope that the Doctors are wrong
- ▣ Hope that the progression won't be too quick
- ▣ Perhaps we even hope for another illness to take our loved one rather than the process of dementia.

But that, too, fades...

- ▣ Hope for a cure fades over time
- ▣ Peaks and valleys as the disease progresses lead to periods of hope punctuated by periods of helplessness and grief
- ▣ With each downturn grief increases as well as your sense of helplessness

Eventually we must surrender to the illness's progression – not giving up hope

New Hope

- ▣ Hope for good quality of life until the end
- ▣ Hope for a peaceful death
- ▣ Possible hope for reconciliation with an estranged family member
- ▣ Other hopes?

But we have not stopped grieving – it goes on – yet we are trying to emotionally hold out hope and to grieve our losses at the same time.

Here comes the scary ride...

Facing the pits of grief following the highs of hope



Complicating Factors

- ▣ Society sees death and grief as taboo subjects
- ▣ Dementia scares people – what about those strange behaviours?
- ▣ When people do talk to you they may say some inappropriate or hurtful things:
 - “How can you watch them suffer?”
 - “At least you still have him/her”
 - “Be thankful this isn’t a sudden death, you have time to prepare”

And the hurt Goes On...

- ▣ People aren't able to understand what you're experiencing unless they have gone through the same journey
- ▣ Often they will 'shut you down' when you try to express your feelings
- ▣ Certainly people don't understand grief BEFORE a death

Giving your Grief a Fancy Name

- ▣ When Grief is not seen as 'usual' we term this "Disenfranchised Grief"

- this is grief which isn't validated or supported by the larger community – usually because it isn't understood.

Other examples of disenfranchised grief are:

grief following the death of a pet

grief experienced by a person with an intellectual disability

grief over a death due to HIV/ Aids

What does the road ahead look like?

Will your grief following the death be less?

NO – right now you grieve your multiple/current losses as well as that which lies ahead.

When death comes you will be grieving that event just as much despite what you are going through now. That loss will be total.

When a sudden death occurs we can liken it to an explosion. A slow, progressive death is like a glacier – moving along and grinding down all in its path.

After your loved one dies you will also lose your role as a caregiver – this can be a major shift in your life and is another cause for grief.

what do I do with all this time?

who am I now if not a caregiver?

Might you feel relief?

- feeling relief can also bring feelings of guilt.

How do you Deal with this Grief?

Use the gift of time for you and your loved one – enjoy each other, reminisce about happy times

Use the time to talk about end of life issues and wishes – include children

Talk about your feelings, if you can't talk to your loved one seek out a safe person or place to do so

Give yourself permission to grieve your losses – name them and cry – being stoic only adds to the hurt

Develop a support network – ask for help and give yourself some breaks

Self Care

Develop a plan of health activity

Practice good nutrition – no matter how tired you are – eat!

Give yourself breaks

Set boundaries – learn to say NO

Nourish your creative side – maybe you have always wanted to learn to knit

Nourish your inner child – colouring books can be very relaxing!

Above all – DON'T feel guilty – there is no percentage in having 2 sick people!

It really is About YOU!

Grief is your journey

You walk a delicate balance between letting go of your loved one and drawing closer to them

It's the challenge of feeling hope and grief at the same time

YOU have needs – and YOU have to meet them

- no two people experience grief the same way

Grief is self- centered – NOT selfish

You Are the Only One YOU have

Reminder:
Take
Care of
Myself

Contact Information:

Mary Ann Rosenbloom

Hospice & Palliative Care Manitoba

204 – 889 – 8525 Ext. 229