



# DAYBREAK

In touch during a time of grief

## Make Every Day Count

*In **Make Every Day Count**, persons who have lost a loved one share their experiences. This month, Bonnie J., a mother of three school-aged children, writes about how her family coped with the death of her husband.*

“My husband died after battling cancer for several years. During that time, my children were very aware that their dad was sick and may not survive. Still, even though we had some time to prepare, his death was devastating. Sometimes, I felt that I could not allow myself the time or space to grieve because I was so focused on helping my children. Over time, though, I realized that letting them see my grief was OK. In fact, by opening up to them, they became more open about their grief, and we helped each other. By letting them help me in my bad times, my kids began to heal themselves.

I also sought help from their teachers. I asked them to let me know if they noticed any difficulties at school. It helped me to know that there were other people in their lives who could help me through the toughest times. A couple of times I did get calls. One of my daughters seemed to withdraw from her friends for a time, and so we took advantage of the school’s counselors to help us through that.

By being open with each other, and by letting others help us, my children and I are all beginning to heal.”

## Give Yourself Permission to Grieve

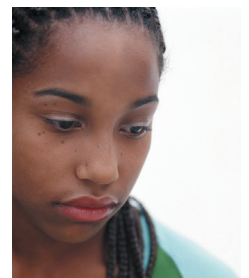
Grief is a normal response to the loss of someone you love. This is one of the most painful experiences that we, as human beings, ever face. But you can endure it.

Experts on grieving describe a process that includes a number of reactions. These usually occur in a progression that includes shock, denial, anger, guilt, depression, acceptance and growth. Many people feel several of these emotions at the same time.

At the four-month anniversary, you are still grieving. Perhaps you are only beginning to realize the depth of your sadness and the hole in your life brought about by the death of your loved one. Because grief is so painful you may try to get over your loss by denying the pain.

Denial is a defense mechanism that a grieving person sometimes uses in order to cope with stress. Denial, which can take many forms, helps shield our mind from the pain of thinking about losing our loved one.

While denial is more common in the early weeks after the death, it can continue over time, too. For example, you may find yourself setting a place at the table for your loved one, or even feel his or her presence in the room. On occasion a bereaved person will report seeing their deceased loved one in a crowd. Widows insist they heard their deceased husband’s key in the door at the “usual time.” While such occurrences are unexpected, it’s quite normal. When someone has been part of our daily routines, it may take a while to get used to the absence.



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Experts on grief agree that when people don't deal with their emotions the pain does not go away. It remains with them and can surface in surprising ways. That's why it's so important to acknowledge your feelings of grief.

The better option is to recognize that the grieving process can lead to healing and growth. Getting over your loss will be hard work, and you should allow yourself to feel all the emotions that arise. Give in to the pain of your loss. Recognize that grief has no timetable...you may experience many emotions for weeks, months, even years to come. But as your grief becomes less painful you will look forward to better days. You will see that life can go on.

## Signs of Grieving

Use this as a self-assessment. Grief is a normal response to the death of a loved one. Are you grieving? The following is a list of common physical and behavioral responses that are normal during the grief process.

### Physical Sensations

- Dry mouth
- Tight throat or a lump in your throat
- A hollow, empty feeling
- Appetite changes
- Digestion disturbance including nausea or indigestion
- Lack of energy
- Weak muscles
- General achiness
- Headaches
- Sensitivity to noise

### Behavioral Characteristics

- Inability to maintain normal activity
- Inability to make decisions
- Lack of motivation
- Restlessness
- Forgetfulness
- Insomnia
- Crying unexpectedly
- Isolating yourself from others

*Note:* If you are experiencing any prolonged or unusual physical symptoms, please contact your doctor.

Remember, these are common reactions to the death of a loved one. The best way to deal with grief is to recognize it, talk about your feelings with people you love, and seek help from support groups or grief counselors.

## We Are Here To Help

It's important to talk about your loss with compassionate friends and family. Many people also seek the comfort of support groups during this difficult time. The Daybreak Bereavement Program, provided by the hospice services of Advocate Aurora Health at Home, offers a wide range of opportunities for individual or group support. For more information, or talk to a bereavement counselor, please contact:

- Illinois 800-813-5185
- Wisconsin 800-862-2201