

Grief: the word most commonly used to describe the constellation of emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual experiences that naturally follow the experience of loss.

Mourning: the word commonly used to refer to the public expression of grief.

Characteristics of Grief/Mourning (partial lists)

Physical: deep sighing; weakness and fatigue; rapid heartbeat; increased blood pressure; increase in activity; decrease in activity; muscular tension; decreased resistance to illness; neglect of self-care; increase in self care; heaviness or tightness in the chest; nausea; dizziness; feeling flushed or feverish; cold or clammy hand; nervousness or trembling; shortness of breath; headaches; constipation or diarrhea; dry mouth, tightness or “lump” in the throat; aches and pains in muscles and joints; change in appetite; change in sleep pattern; tears at unexpected times and places.

Emotional: shock and disbelief; panic; sadness; crying; emptiness; longing/pining/yearning; despair; hopelessness; helplessness; nervousness; restlessness; worthlessness; anxiety; mood changes; emotional outbursts; denial; anger; irritability; rage; guilt; shame; fear; frustration; impatience; emotional exhaustion; sorrow; feelings of being lost; loneliness; relief; peace; comforted; bitterness; vengefulness; blameful.

Mental: loss of short term memory; confusion; denial; disbelief; disorganization; difficulty in performing/completing tasks or chores; difficulty concentrating; dreaming; intense preoccupation with the past; difficulty in communication; sense of the presence of the deceased; searching for the deceased; difficulty making decisions and problem solving; difficulty making plans and keeping commitments; difficulty in coping with significant dates; anniversaries, and holidays; struggles in coping with changes in relationships; remembering.

Spiritual: trying to have the loss “make sense” by searching into one’s belief system; questioning the meaning and purpose of life/death; finding comfort in religious belief and rituals; finding religious beliefs and rituals empty/meaningless; anger toward God/Creator/Universe; feeling the presence of the deceased; searching for the presence of the deceased; feeling punished/rewarded because of the loss event; questioning the trustworthiness of the higher power

Factors that Influence Grief/Mourning

- The survivor’s age, gender, race, culture, beliefs, level of maturity and comprehension, personality, temperament, and coping skills
- The deceased’s age, gender, race, culture, beliefs and personality
- The relationship between survivor and the deceased
- The circumstance of the loss/death
- The role changes in the family and the survivor
- The survivor’s previous losses and loss experiences, and unfinished grief work
- The survivor’s available support systems
- The simultaneous presence of other losses, crises, stresses.

If you would like to talk with someone at Iowa City Hospice about your grief, please call us at (319) 351-5665 or 1-800-897-3052 or go to our website, www.iowacityhospice.org.