

## Reactions to a Loss

Bereavement, grieving and mourning; although often used interchangeably, are defined based on their distinct characteristics and longevity. There is no set time limit for grieving or mourning; times will vary based on the individual and their relationship to the deceased.

**Bereavement** is the period of grieving and mourning after a death occurs.

**Grieving** is part of the normal process of reacting to a death and may be expressed as a mental, physical, social or emotional reaction. Mental reactions can include anger, guilt, anxiety, sadness and despair. Physical reactions can include insomnia or sleeping problems, loss of appetite, aggravated health problems or illnesses. Social effects may include isolation, and disinterest in usual activities or hobbies.

**Mourning** is the period in which a person integrates the loss into their life and accommodates the change. The mourner shifts from a relationship of presence to a relationship of memory. While the outward expression of grief can be time limited, mourning can take a lifetime.

Below are common reactions that you can expect of yourself and others who are experiencing the loss of a loved one.

- Fear
- Despair
- Confusion
- Denial/disbelief
- Lack of ability to concentrate
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Sadness/depression
- Vulnerability
- Anger
- Resentment
- Sense of failure
- Loss of control
- Bitterness
- Apathy
- Spiritual crisis
- Preoccupied with the deceased
- Decreased self-esteem; unsure of yourself or your abilities
- Dreams of the event
- Withdrawal from family and friends (avoidance)