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## Hospice Grief Outreach - May

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### What's "Normal"?

Grief often brings with it a combination of feelings, thoughts, and reactions that may be completely new for us. It affects us physically, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and socially. Anger, love, guilt, sadness, fear, doubt, and loneliness are just some of the many emotional responses that are part of grieving. While all of us, no doubt, at some time in our lives have felt all of these things, it is not until we experience the acute pain of mourning a loved one that these emotions come together in intense and confusing combinations. And in the midst of all this, we are likely expected to "get on with things": going to work, making dinner, taking care of the practical tasks and duties that fall to us when someone we've shared our life with dies. Oftentimes a significant loss leads to many changes all at once, which can feel overwhelming and disorienting. No wonder grief might make us feel like we're going crazy - our inner and outer worlds have been thrown into chaos!

We also hear a lot of contradictory messages about what "normal" grief looks like. But everyone experiences grief differently. While one person might have a certain combination of feelings, thoughts and reactions, someone else might have the opposite feelings, thoughts and reactions. And both people can be within the range of "normal" grief. This range of what's "normal" is much wider than we usually think it is. For example, some people might tell us it's "normal" to keep all our emotions bottled up. Yet others would have us believe that "normal" grief involves tears or rage and that if people don't show those things, they are not grieving "properly". In fact, both of these patterns can be "normal" depending on the person and nature of their loss.

While it would be impossible to list them all, here's just a brief list of some of the "normal" things people might experience when grieving. Of course, not everyone will experience all of these things, but they are all common and reasonable reactions to grief.

- ☀ It's normal to feel like you're losing your mind...
- ☀ It's normal for little things to overwhelm you...
- ☀ It's normal to feel irritated all of the time and not know why...

- It's normal to momentarily forget that your loved one died...
- It's normal to have trouble focusing on tasks that used to be easy...
- It's normal to talk to the person as if they are still alive...
- It's normal to think you see them walking down the street or driving past you...
- It's normal to set a place for them at dinner (either intentionally or accidentally)...
- It's normal to cry at the drop of a hat and not know why...
- It's normal to feel like all of the joy has been sucked out of the world...
- It's normal to experience grief triggers years after the person's death...
  - It's normal to wonder, "Why am I still here?"...
- It's normal to replay certain memories over and over in your mind...
- It's normal to create memory boxes, "shrines", or other symbols of remembrance...
- It's normal to feel like no one else understands the pain you're going through...
- It's normal to resent the world for continuing as if nothing has happened...

With so many feelings, thoughts, and reactions within the range of "normal" grief, perhaps you're wondering what's not "normal"? Many experts in the field of grief and bereavement actually avoid the whole concept of "normal" because extreme reactions can also be expected, predictable responses to grief depending on people's life circumstances. Our past experiences with loss, our relationship to the deceased, our level of dependency on the person, the type of death, and level of social supports can all influence how intense or prolonged our grief might be.

However, there are some grief reactions that do require additional attention. For instance, if you've having thoughts of harming yourself or someone else, if you're having prolonged intense emotions that are interfering with your day-to-day functioning, or if you're experiencing intrusive grief-related flashbacks or thoughts that you find disturbing, it's important to consult someone – your doctor, a spiritual care provider, a counselor, or a trusted friend or family member. There are people who can help you manage the often painful overwhelming aspects of grief.

*If you are no longer interested in receiving our monthly mail out, please let us know.  
Feedback about our programs is always appreciated.*

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