

## What is Grief and Mourning?

Grief can be described as being a rational and natural response to the loss of a loved one. It is the full range of emotions, thoughts and experiences one endures when someone they love dies. Anticipatory grief is grief which occurs prior to the loved one's death. It is important to recognize that this may entail a wide variety of emotions and experiences and may trigger responses that are physical, mental, behavioral, emotional or spiritual in nature. Some of these may be conflicted such as feelings of guilt surrounding a feeling of relief over an end to a loved one's physical suffering.

***What are some of the emotions, thoughts and experiences you have noticed in your grief?***

Mourning is the expression of the emotions and thoughts related to grief. To mourn is to release those emotions in order to allow for healing. This release can be through emoting (crying, etc.), talking, writing, physical activities (running, exercise) or any other healthy method of release.

***What are some of the ways you express and release all the emotions you noted above?***

***What do you think you would need in order to feel supported during this time? Who in your personal life do you think may be able to provide you with that support?***

## Where to Turn for Anticipatory Grief Resources and Support:

Our Bereavement Website is an online Bereavement Community Resource page which is readily available to you at any time. Psychoeducational information surrounding grief, bereavement and loss, information regarding our bereavement related events and programs and links to other relevant community-based resources are provided. In the event you are unable to access our online resources, please do not hesitate to reach out to our Bereavement Center. We will do all that we can to offer you guidance and direction.

Peer support groups can be a tremendous resource during challenging times. They provide an opportunity to share your story with others as well as to hear from others who have experienced the loss of a loved one. While each individual loss and experience is unique, much can be gained from connecting with others who are also walking along this road of bereavement. Our group schedule can be found on our website as well as links to connect to other groups throughout the state of New Jersey. In the event you cannot access our online resources, please contact our Bereavement Center to speak with our staff at 973-948-2283.

If you find yourself continuing to struggle during your grieving process and feel you may benefit from some individual support, our Bereavement Center offers one-on-one counseling. Sometimes it helps to talk through experiences and emotions in order to gain more explicit awareness of them.

The most important thing to remember during this time is to be compassionate toward yourself. Facing the loss of a loved one can change your entire world. It becomes important to honor and experience your needs and emotions as they are, not how you or anyone else wants them to be or thinks they should be. This is your time to do what is best for you and your loved one. Please know you do not have to walk this road alone.



## Anticipatory Grief Guidance and Psychoeducational Sheet (GPS):

A Bereavement Awareness and Support Community (BAASC) Initiative Component

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## You are not alone.

You have received this information because you've found out that your loved one has received a terminal diagnosis/prognosis and you are now faced with losing them. We cannot imagine what you are thinking or feeling in this moment. Regardless of the surrounding circumstances of the health challenges or the age of your loved one, being faced with losing such a cherished relationship can be one of the most challenging and painful experiences of this life, especial-

ly when being tasked with making decisions on that loved one's behalf. Based upon our hospice and bereavement experience, we have tried to imagine what would be most helpful to you and hope to offer you some support and guidance during this difficult time. Please read this in small doses or read this all at once – in whatever way you can best explore and reflect on this information. This is your time to try to do what's best for you and your loved one. Please know that you don't have to walk this road alone.

## What To Do When Facing to Loss of a Loved One:



**Be Informed.** Ask questions of your loved one's doctors and care staff so you have all of the information relevant to your loved one's care. Ask about and record their medication regimen and side effects, upcoming doctor appointments, occupational and physical therapy routines or exercises to be completed, etc. Keep this information written down and organized in a binder. This may be helpful in keeping informed and communicating on-going updates and care plans to your loved one's doctors and care staff. It is important to advocate for yourself and for your loved one by ensuring you both understand their health challenges and the possible outcomes. This is also helpful when speaking to others in your life who also care for your loved one. Having all the relevant information may help to guide you in their care and any related decision-making processes and in making the best decision for you and your loved one's specific situation. The more thoroughly you understand your loved one's situation; the better your loved one can be cared for

and kept as comfortable and healthy for as long as possible. This understanding may also be helpful for your own self-care and support, especially surrounding any health care decisions that may have to be made. It is common to experience guilt during one's anticipatory grieving process, especially when faced with making significant choices on the behalf of a loved one. By clearing up any uncertainties, to the extent possible, in terms of the health challenges and prognosis, you may be able to offer yourself some comfort during times of doubt or regret in your compassionate decision to support your loved one during their end of life transition. Be certain to ask the doctor and medical supports what to expect throughout the course of the illness and during the end of life process. Don't be afraid to ask these questions. By being informed you will be better able to prepare and support yourself and to be present with your loved one for as long as possible.

**Be self-aware.** There are a wide variety

emotions you may experience when facing the death of your loved one and they may change often and quickly. Try to allow yourself to experience, express and release these emotions in healthy ways (talking, writing, crying, exercising etc.) rather than trying to be "strong" or to avoid them. These are part of a normal, natural process of grief which one experiences when facing a loss, typically through death. It is important to be honest in what you are feeling in order to promote self-care. Caring for yourself allows you to better care for your loved one. Have a plan for what you can do to support yourself during difficult times and throughout the end of life process.

### **Be supported.**

Allow people in your life to support you. Let the people who care for you and for your loved one know what is happening and how they can support you during this time. Allow others who care for your loved one to spend time with them and say goodbye. Their connection and time spent with them may be helpful to you as well. If you feel it may be helpful, ask someone you trust to come to appointments with you and your loved one, as appropriate. Every individual experiences loss in their own way and has their own idea of what providing support looks like. Therefore, it becomes important to tell them how they can help to support you. Be specific in what may be helpful to you. These needs may change over time which makes it helpful for every-

one involved to continue to speak openly. Accepting offered support can be difficult for many people and asking for it can be even more difficult. Allow yourself to depend on others as needed throughout your anticipatory grieving process. Remember that this process will be as unique as your individual relationship with your loved one.

**Be connected** with and memorialize your loved one. It can be helpful to memorialize the relationship and all that you have gained

from your loved one while trying to find a way through what will be lost upon their death. It is a reminder of everything they were and is another way to honor them and to provide yourself with meaningful support. Start early and give yourself and your loved one as many meaningful memories as you are able during the time you have together. Spend extra time talking about what matters to you both. Take the time, as possible, to say the things you would like to say to your loved one and give them



the time to say what they need to say to you. Talk about your favorite memories and talk about what you are both going through together. Think about how you might like to memorialize them after they have passed and talk to them about how they would like to be memorialized. Memorialization may look different to different people so, whenever possible, try to explore this thoroughly.