

# Grief Reactions

It is dangerous to assume that everyone will conform to a recognised pattern of grief, but most people will experience the following to some degree:

## Shock / Numbness

The first reaction to death is shock, which can manifest in reactions ranging from speechlessness to outbursts of emotion. Even where the death has been expected, shock will still occur. Where the death is sudden shock will be greater. Numbness is experienced so that the body does not have to deal with the enormity of what has happened all at once, but can do so gradually.

## Denial

Everything can seem very unreal after a death, and disbelief can be felt to the point where we actually deny the death. This denial prevents us from having to cope with what has happened as we have not yet accepted the reality of the loss.

## Searching

When we have lost something or someone, it is natural to search for them. We do this subconsciously even though we know we will not find the deceased; it is an automatic reaction which can go on for some months. In children the fact that the person is not found may lead to anxiety about separation from other loved ones.

## Despair

This follows when we realise that the person cannot be found and is not coming back.

## Anger

Anger is as natural a part of grief as sadness. It can be directed against the person who has died for leaving; the self for not saving them, or God for taking them away. In cases where negligence or violence is to blame anger can be overwhelming.

## Anxiety and Guilt

Regrets will surface as we think of the times we did not speak or act as we should have done. We may feel guilty that we have not saved the person from death, or that we are alive and they are not ('survivor guilt'). Children may have anxieties about daily life and then feel guilty that they are worried about such apparently selfish concerns.