

Timetable for grief

One of the most frequently asked questions is: “How long will these feelings last?” The following guidelines are general descriptions and may vary widely from one individual to another.

Month One: In the first month, grieving persons may be so busy with funeral arrangements, visitors, paperwork and other immediate tasks that they have little time to begin the grieving process. They may also be numb and feel that the loss is unreal. This shock can last beyond the first month if the death was sudden, violent or particularly untimely.

Month Three: The three-month point is a particularly challenging time for many grieving persons. Visitors have gone home, cards and calls have pretty much stopped coming in, and most of the numbness has worn off. Well meaning family and friends who do not understand the grief process may pressure the grieving person to get back to normal. The grieving person is just beginning the very painful task of understanding what this loss really means.

Months four through twelve: The grieving person continues to work through the many tasks of learning to live with the loss. There begin to be more good days than bad days. Difficult periods will crop up sometimes with no obvious trigger, even late into the last half of the first year. It is important that the grieving person understands that these difficult periods are normal rather than a setback or a sign of lack of progress.

Significant anniversaries: During the first year, personal and public holidays present additional challenges. Birthdays, wedding anniversaries, and family and school reunions can be difficult periods. Medical anniversaries, such as the day of the diagnosis, the day someone was hospitalized or came home from the hospital can also bring up memories. The grieving person may not be consciously keeping track of these dates but is still affected by them.

The one-year anniversary of the death: Reactions to the anniversary of the death may begin days or weeks before the actual date. Many people describe reliving those last difficult days. Even individuals who have been doing very well toward the end of the first year may be surprised at how intensely the one-year anniversary affects them. People generally welcome additional acknowledgement or support during anniversaries.

The second year: Most grieving people agree that it takes at least two years to start feeling like they have established workable new routines and a new identity without the deceased person. Many of the tasks of the second year have to do with reassessing goals, discovering a new identity and creating a different lifestyle.