

## **These feelings and emotions are normal.....**

**Sadness** – for the loss in your life.

**Shock / disbelief** – at what has happened, numbness, a sense of unreality.

**Fear** – of a similar event happening again, feeling vulnerable.

**Anger** – at what happened and possibly, towards who or what caused it.

**Helplessness** – which underlines human powerlessness.

**Guilt** – that there are things you did or didn't do well enough.

**Relief** – that your loved one's suffering is now over and that you also are now free from the worry and the exhaustion of providing care.

**Loneliness** – as you miss your loved one's companionship.

**Frustration** – as you are forced into learning new tasks and roles.

***'Different feelings are experienced by different people at different times'***

## **You may experience other effects....**

**Physical symptoms** – breathing difficulties, upset stomach, headaches, palpitations, tightness in the throat or chest, hollowness in the stomach, muscle weakness, lack of energy and over sensitivity to noise.

**Tension** – more easily startled, agitated or short-tempered.

**Dreams and nightmares** – of the incident, or other frightening events.

**Intrusive memories and feelings** - in the form of flashbacks.

**Sexual difficulties**

**Sleep problems**

**Depression and withdrawal**

**Relationship problems** – in the family/whanau or with others.

**Alcohol and drug taking may increase**

**Accidents** – can become more frequent.

**Cognitive difficulties** – confusion, preoccupation, hallucinations, memory loss.

***'These are responses that help people adapt to sudden change or loss. They will disappear in time'***

## **What can help.....**

- Expressing your emotions and letting your children share in the grief.
- Talking about what happened.
- Keeping contact with friends or family/whanau and seeking the support of others.
- Eating well and keeping active.
- Taking time out to rest, sleep, think or have a break.
- Avoiding making any hasty, major decisions.
- Remembering that your children will experience similar feelings to yourself.
- Trying to keep your life as normal as possible but at your own pace. Living one day at a time and getting on with the present.

**Don't expect the memories to go away. You will never forget the one who has died, nor will you "get over it". In time you will start to make some meaning of your loved one's life and your place in it, and then it feels easier to carry on day by day.**

**'The bad days may come and go and there can be many low points, especially around the 6 weeks, 4-6 months, 12 months and 2 year points. Be gentle with yourself at these times'.**

## When to seek professional help

If you experience being overwhelmed by intense feelings that are on going and make it difficult for you to function from day to day.

If there have been recently, or are still, a number of other stressful factors in your life that are making it difficult to cope.

If you continue to use alcohol or drugs to excess since the event.

If your school performance suffers

If your relationships are suffering.

If you notice major long-term behavioural changes in your children.

If you are experiencing panic attacks that are frightening or limiting you in any way.

**‘Remember there is no right way to grieve and no set time-frame.**

**You are unique and the relationship with the person you have lost is yours alone.**

**You are not ‘abnormal’ if you feel and act differently from how your family and friends do now or have in the past.**

**This is your journey’.**

## Where to seek professional help

The staff where your loved one was cared for can provide a listening ear. They may also be able to refer you to an appropriate bereavement support service.

Your general practitioner may be able to provide support or refer you to a suitable therapist.

Counsellors or psychotherapists in private practice.

Your local church.

Ministers of religion/spiritual advisors.

Counselling services funded by your employer (where such a scheme exists).

Literature – many good books are available. Contact National Association of Loss and Grief (NALG); Skylight (Wellington); your local bookseller, counsellors and chaplains or Hospice for suggestions.

Internet/web sites offering support and information.

We would like to thank Arohanui Hospice, Palmerston North for their willingness to share their resources.



## Coping with Bereavement



This pamphlet points out some of the common feelings and after-effects when a loved one dies.

It includes suggestions of ways to seek help for yourself and those around you should it be needed.