GRIEF & LOSS
We generally think of grief as a reaction to death. However, there is another kind of grief that comes from loss when someone is still living. This grief is often seen if you are living with a chronic illness or are caring for someone else with one.

You may experience many kind of losses: loss of independence, loss of control, loss of the future as you had imagined, loss of financial security, loss of the relationship, and loss of role. It can be easy to ignore these losses. It is important to identify your losses and let yourself grieve what has happened in your lives.
Don’t discount some of the everyday losses you experience. They may not affect you as deeply as the actual death, but they do still impact you all the same. If you learn how to work through these losses it will help you to grieve well, because unresolved grief can lead to emotional and physical health problems. The depth of your grieving depends on the significance of your loss. You may work through some situations quickly, while others may take a long time.

Death is an inevitable fact of life that many of us will have to deal with many times, whether it is a loved one, a family member, a friend or even ourselves. Despite the fact that we know this universal truth, it does not make it any easier to deal with when it happens to us or someone close to us.

When the topic of death comes up it often raises our anxiety. Whether we are dealing with a sudden loss versus an anticipated loss, we are still not prepared. When the death actually happens, it still is somewhat of a surprise and we are not ready for it.
The loss of a loved one is the single most stressful event that can happen to a person. Every person copes with the loss of a loved one in his or her own individual way. There is no ‘right’ way to cope with death; there is no normal healing process. Grief is a natural process of reacting to a loss. Grief may cause a mental, physical, social or emotional reaction, or a combination of any or all of the above. Your reaction and response to your loss will depend on the relationship you had with the person who died.
The loss of a loved one brings many physical, psychological, and spiritual responses to grief. There is no time frame for the length of grieving. Everyone grieves in his or her own way and time. There is no right or wrong way to cope with the passing of a loved one. Grief is the normal process of reacting to the loss.

Though we may all grieve differently there are some common responses we may experience:

**Common Psychological/Emotional Responses**

- Shock and numbness
- Denial – this didn’t happen
- Anxiety/nervousness
- Anger – it’s unfair
- Guilt – it’s all my fault
- Sadness/crying
- Depression – I’m all alone
- Withdraw socially
- Feeling a loss of control
- Disorganized thoughts
- Preoccupied with image of deceased
- Increased use of drugs and alcohol – this only delays the grief process
Common Physical Responses
- Loss of appetite/food doesn’t taste the same
- Nausea/vomiting/diarrhea constipation
- Fatigue/increase sleep
- Difficulty sleeping

Common Spiritual Responses
- Anger toward God/
- Alienation from God
- Deepening of faith
- Life loses meaning

Spiritual doubts and questions may arise when a loved one dies. It may challenge your belief system. Despite the initial conflicts that may occur, we may ultimately find comfort and solace from our religious practices, rituals and beliefs.
Anticipatory Grief

Anticipatory grief is the normal mourning that occurs when an individual or family is expecting death. It has many of the same symptoms as those experienced after death has occurred. It includes all of the thinking, feeling, cultural and social reactions to an expected death that are felt by the person and family.
Anticipatory grief includes preparing for the death and adjusting to the changes caused by the death. Anticipatory loss is the normal mourning when a person or family is expecting death. The life of the patient and the family is re-examined. It is preparing for a life-changing event that affects every aspect of one’s life. It is the gradual reality of impending loss. It may give the family more time to slowly get used to the reality of loss. At times, people are able to complete unfinished business with the dying person (i.e. “goodbye”, “I love you”, “I forgive you”).
The grief experienced before a death does not make the grief after the death last a shorter period of time. There is no set amount of grief that a person will feel. We do not experience emotions on an even level; rather it may appear as if we are on a roller coaster. Grief is not a single emotion but rather contains a great number of emotions, both positive and negative.

Bereavement is the period after the loss during which grief is experienced and mourning occurs. The time one spends in bereavement depends on how attached he or she was to the person who died, and how much time was spent anticipating the loss.

Mourning is the process by which people adapt to a loss. Mourning is also influenced by cultural customs, rituals, and society's rules for coping and loss.
The loss of a loved one is the single most stressful thing that can happen to a person. It takes time to grieve and heal. It is important to give yourself the time that you need. With time, you can find happiness in your life. By accepting loss, it does not mean that you will forget the loved one. Instead, acceptance can allow hope and happiness to be a part of life again. Know that you can feel better over time.
Grief that follows an unplanned death is different from an anticipatory grief. Unplanned loss may overwhelm the coping abilities of a person; mourners may not be able to realize the total impact of their loss. Mourners may feel that the world no longer has order and does not make sense after an unexpected death.

To help yourself through the grief process be open and honest about your needs. Let friends and family help you. Try not to bottle up your emotions.

For some people, feelings of loss are debilitating and don’t improve even after time passes. This is known as complicated grief. In complicated grief, painful emotions are so long lasting and severe that you have trouble accepting the loss and resuming your own life. If feelings of intense grief continue it would be important to see your physician.

There are things you can do to try to help with feelings of grief:

- Be prepared to have both good and bad days. Don’t expect grief to go away quickly; it takes time.
- Try to maintain your own physical health and postpone making major life decisions until you are ready.
Grief takes time and it is work. Don’t put a time limit around your grief. It’s okay to express yourself. Seek counseling if you don’t know how to cope, are experiencing excessive sadness, or feel suicidal. Counseling can help you find healthy coping skills and provide additional support.

Grieving is important to your emotional and physical health. Give yourself the space to experience your feelings, practice self-care and seek support from loved ones and professionals if needed. If you learn how and take time to grieve your losses, you will be healthier in every way.