



**MOST PEOPLE** find the loss of a loved one the most intense and difficult experience of their lives. To lose someone is a universal experience. To mourn is a universal emotion. Yet, many people are confused about the nature of mourning. Many of those who grieve try to hide their sorrow. Some in our culture believe that mourning should be suppressed. We now know that to suppress, further disorients us and makes us more at risk for both emotional and physical illness.

If you are newly bereaved, you may find it very difficult to concentrate on what you are reading, and that is perfectly normal. We will further discuss specific topics to be considered when it's not so difficult to think. Let's go over some mistakes many mourners make.

**THE MOST COMMON MISTAKE** made by mourners usually begins with people believing that mourning should be over in a short period of time. We know, on the basis of scientific polls, for example, that a majority of people believe mourning should be over within 48 hours to two weeks. **THIS ASSUMPTION IS FALSE.** Loss of your loved one will have a measurable and significant impact on you well beyond a year's time.



**SECONDLY**, many people believe that they can suppress their sorrows, at least to other people's eyes. They try to use alcohol or tranquilizing drugs to suppress their emotions. They inevitably fail. Our emotions and their expression are the only means we have to reorient ourselves after a major change in our lives. It is important for your emotional and physical health to express emotions in non-destructive ways. One of most effective ways of recovering from sorrow is to cry. Whether you are a man or a woman, crying seems to be necessary for your health. To cry with others who grieve makes the task of reorientation easier.

**A THIRD COMMON MISTAKE** of mourners is to try to make their sorrow a private matter. No matter how overwhelmed, lonely, or impotent you feel, your loss is others' loss also. It is important that you include, not exclude, others in mourning your loss.

**A FOURTH COMMON MISTAKE** is attempting to escape the pain of loss by making even more changes in your life; selling the house, changing your job, going on long trips. All of these may be appropriate in time; but not when we mourn. Like our shadows, we cannot run away from our feelings of sorrow. Buying binges, changes in our living habits, taking flight from our routines of care, these are a few examples of how we can mistakenly try to avoid sorrow. What is important is to make as few changes in your circumstances of living as possible. While there will be many changes you cannot avoid, postpone as many as you can.

**A FIFTH COMMON MISTAKE** of mourners is to ignore their own health. Some seem to adopt the extreme feeling that the best way to honor the dead is to die with them. For others, it is to abandon self-esteem. Neither of these is helpful. Whatever the reason, you need to care for your own health.

**MOURNING IS NOT SHORT.** Its characteristics cannot be suppressed. Your feelings of loss are not a private matter and your feelings cannot be escaped. Mourning is the means by which we recover our orientation to living following a significant change in our lives. Mourning is a normal and necessary part of living. It is process we use to overcome the disorientation which follows loss. Your loss may not only be painful, but also the most significant change in living you have ever experienced. The best thing we can do when we mourn is to respect our feelings. This allows us to adapt. As many as one-fourth of mourners fail to adapt and are at high risk of life threatening illness.

### **HEALTHFUL WAYS TO COPE WITH YOUR LOSS**

While research is ongoing it is very clear that these five things are necessary for healthy living. They are: 1) having nurturing and supportive friendships; 2) a balanced diet; 3) an adequate fluid intake; 4) daily exercise; and 5) a daily routine of rest.



Of these five, **the most important** is having and maintaining, nurturing and supportive friendships. Maintain your friendships and let others do things for you. Ask for their help.



**MOURNERS** often cut themselves off from friends and family. When mourning, you need friends and family to share self doubt, uncertainties and hurt. It has been proven that even the most intelligent and emotionally balanced person, becomes disoriented when deprived of human contact.

If you are mourning, continue to participate in some of your social activities. If you feel unsupported by friends or relatives, seek out a mutual help group for the bereaved. Your pastor or a chaplain can assist you.

**THE SECOND FACTOR** is having a daily and adequate balanced diet. Without the nurturing support of others, many mourners lose their appetites, or use “junk” or “quickie” foods. High risk health habits such as smoking, heavy consumption of alcohol and erratic eating which leads to fluctuation in weight are far more likely to occur among the socially isolated. Make sure you have a well balanced diet each day.

**THE THIRD FACTOR** is to protect your health by drinking an adequate amount of water daily. We have found that mourners have a tendency to

override their sense of thirst, yet adequate hydration is necessary to carry away the body's toxic wastes and to maintain appropriate blood chemistry. Beverages with alcohol or caffeine should not be used, except in the most moderate amounts. They cause our bodies to become further dehydrated.

**THE FOURTH FACTOR** if we are to maintain our health, we also need to exercise daily, taking vigorous walks, for example, of at least 20 minutes, stretching exercises, or aerobic activities.

**AND FINALLY**, you need a daily routine of rest, whether you sleep soundly or not. It's normal for mourners to have difficulty both in failing asleep at night and getting up in the morning. Following the dietary advice given earlier, will help you maintain normal cycles of rest and activity

As a precaution, it is appropriate for you to have a thorough physical examination. The best time seems to be between the fourth and fifth month following your loss. Statistical studies indicate that if you are one of the minority of mourners who will develop a life threatening illness, the symptoms are likely to be present during that time. Remember, it will take many months to become reoriented to living. As painful and lonely as a loss can be, following the habits outlined in this brochure are helpful things you can do to cope with grief.

Taken from video tapes by Dr. Glenn Davidson, PhD and produced by Twenty-Twenty Medical, A Subsidiary of Dodge Chemical Co.

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## COPING WITH THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE



PLACER COUNTY  
LAW ENFORCEMENT  
CHAPLAINCY, INC.



P.O. Box 1111 Newcastle, CA 95658  
916.672.6984 [www.placerchaplains.com](http://www.placerchaplains.com)