

The Healing Journey

Zusman Hospice Bereavement Support

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The Physical Side of Grief

Grief is an emotionally intense journey, and it is also a very physical experience for most people. Even when the death is expected, grief may strike with the force of a physical blow, leaving us shaken emotionally and physically. Many caregivers push themselves physically leading up to a death and are now feeling the effects of that. Most caregivers, even with the best of help, lost sleep, ate erratically and did more heavy lifting than usual. Caregivers may have skipped routine health checks, screenings and follow-up visits for existing health problems of their own. After death, many caregivers admit they just don't know how they did it—that they were running on sheer willpower or adrenaline. They find that they don't realize how deeply fatigued they are until after the end of their loved one's illness.

Most of us have areas of our bodies that act up under stress. Some get headaches or stomachaches; others have muscle pains or intestinal problems. During bereavement, these vulnerable areas are likely to reflect stress levels, and grieving people may develop other physical discomforts.

Typical physical reactions to grief:

- Headaches / dizziness
- Shortness of breath / breathlessness
- Dry mouth

Hope is NOT a betrayal of your loved one's memory, but a sign of the life that still lives in YOU.

It's okay to have hope. It's okay to laugh, to do things that are enjoyable and fun, to welcome springtime into your life.

Change is the essence of life.
Be willing to surrender what you are for what you can become.

– Reinhold Niebuhr

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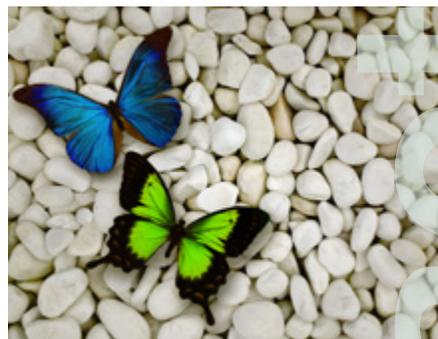

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- Tightness in the throat
- Heaviness in chest
- Nausea
- Changes in appetite
- Stomachaches / hollowness in stomach
- Intestinal problems
- Fatigue
- Muscle tension & pain
- Becoming accident prone
- Weakened immune system
- Changes in sleep pattern
- Oversensitivity to stimuli, especially noise

Increased concern about one's health and the health of other family members is normal. Losing someone close brings up feelings of physical vulnerability. There may be a period when grieving people worry excessively about every little bump or cough. A physical exam to assess the physical impact of stress and to relieve fears is always a sound idea.

Each person grieves differently and needs to be encouraged to respect their own limits, timetables and intuition about what they are ready to handle. Survivors get a lot of unsolicited and confusing advice about what they should be doing and feeling. Grieving people often need permission to not be OK. In a society where we frequently equate emotional pain with weakness and lack of self-control, griever often have unrealistic ideas about how well they should be doing.

We need as much support as we can get in the months after the loss or losses. Grief can be isolating and we often have questions about whether our feelings are normal or not. Sometimes the person or people we lost were the ones we would normally turn to at times of stress. Books on the grief process can help, and support groups provide a valuable outlet for feelings. Many people who join grief support groups are dealing with multiple challenges. We need to be selective about who we spend time with.



Grief support is available to you and your loved ones from the Zusman Hospice Bereavement Staff. We offer support through phone calls, individual counseling and group sessions. Please contact us at **614-559-0350**.

Hope...
Sometimes that's all you have when you have nothing else.
If you have it, you have everything.

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