

ANTICIPATORY GRIEF SUPPORT

Many people do not recognize the hard work of adapting to a diagnosis of a life threatening illness that stresses our bodies, minds and spirits in sometimes intolerable ways. This time is the initial stage of the bereavement process.

"Anticipatory grief refers to the normal process of mourning that occurs in anticipation of the death and its consequences." Therese Rando 1984

We are left with feelings of uncertainty in all aspects of our lives. According to Rando (1984) the process of anticipatory grieving involves adapting in a number of ways to the changes that have or will occur as a result of the illness and expected death.

For the family members there are *two seemingly contradictory and very difficult tasks*:

- On the one hand, family members must remain involved, responding to their loved one's experience, and continuing to share with and include him/her in family activities *and on the other*
- They must recognize their own separateness from their loved one and tolerate the awareness that they will continue to exist after their loved one dies.

Other tasks include:

Meeting the new demands within the family. There will be new responsibilities, new roles and permanent changes that must be anticipated and adjustments made.

Bearing the many conflicting feelings of grief arising from the current situation and the revival of feelings of loss from previous grief experiences. Most commonly, the daily process of watching physical changes and suffering of your loved one stimulates sorrow, depression and anxiety. It is important to feel supported in your ability to express these feelings of grief rather than deny or suppress them.

Coming to terms with the reality of the impending death. Clients and family members will each go through a series of emotional reactions over time that will lead them towards increased awareness and acceptance. Thought of living without your loved one is often intolerable. Families need to be able to anticipate life without their loved one and to start planning for themselves in the future. Clients entertain thoughts of the unknown after death and concerns for the future of the family.

Finding ways to say goody-bye, usually many times, throughout the end of life process. Verbally, non-verbally, in concrete or symbolic ways one acknowledges that a leave-taking is occurring. Each individual will hopefully attempt to resolve old conflicts (unfinished business) to make the final good-bye more peaceful and bearable. Finding and accepting support during this difficult time can help ease the burden of painful feelings and can often bring family members closer together.

Adapted from: Rando, Therese. *Grief, Dying, and Death*. Illinois: Research Press Company. 1984