



# WinterSpring

Facing Loss, Embracing Life Again -- Together

PO Box 8169, Medford, OR 97501

541-552-0620 winterspring.org

## Anticipatory grief

**What is it?** Anticipatory grief is a feeling of loss before a death or dreaded event occurs. While this experience is normal, life may feel far from normal if you're going through it. Complicating the experience is the fluctuation between hope and despair around potentially treatable diseases, such as cancer. Symptoms include deep sadness, crying, holding back tears, exhaustion, anger, and inability to cope with the day-to-day tasks of life. You may also experience denial, fear, mood swings, forgetfulness, disorganized and confused behavior, depression, feeling disconnected and alone. You may have health symptoms, such as weight loss or gain, sleep problems, nervous behavior, and fatigue from the constant heaviness of holding things together.

### ***How to Cope with Anticipatory Grief.***

- Allow yourself to feel the pain. Impending losses are complicated by the closeness of the relationship, the effect on the community, and all the related losses that go with losing someone, such as companionship and financial stability. Past losses may impact you, as well. Denying the pain you feel now can prolong the grief process later on. Crying is healthy.
- Don't do this alone. Find safe places to share your feelings. Create a community of people to help you with day-to-day tasks, if you are struggling.
- Take care of yourself. Eat well, exercise, avoid addictive substances, sleep.
- Recognize that loss of control, anger, and other difficult emotions are a normal part of the process. Go easy on yourself and others for difficult feelings.
- Use tools to help you calm and nurture yourself and experience/express feelings in safe ways: Especially when someone we love is experiencing a long-term illness that is likely to result in death, it's best to get some regular practices in place to care for yourself.
  - Journaling
  - Meditation
  - Artistic expressions
  - Listening to meaningful music
  - Exercise routines that relieve stress
  - Movies, perhaps those that make you laugh
- Practice forgiveness. Realize that this is a stressful time for everyone involved and anger may flare up -- in you, in your loved one, in other caregivers and family/friends. Forgiveness is healing, and can help lighten the burden you carry during this difficult time.
- Remember the children. Children need to be included in the process of anticipatory grief. Open communication about what's happening, and allowing them to express fears verbally and through play and creativity can help them to learn healthy coping skills that will serve them well later in life. Children need to know that after a death, they will still be cared for and safe. Studies show that children who don't have opportunities to grieve are more likely to make poor choices later in life and suffer from anxiety and depression.
- Acknowledge the reality that your loved one might die. While we want to hold onto hope, if their illness deteriorates, it's important to let go and be willing to say goodbye.