



# WinterSpring

*Facing Loss, Embracing Life Again -- Together*

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## Men and Grief

Compiled by Marc Rosewood

The feelings that surround the loss of a loved one are not gender specific but the ways in which men and women process and express those emotions do tend to be different. Although each of us grieves in our own way, there are some common patterns to what men and women find most supportive after a significant loss. In general, men don't talk about their grief easily, and rarely would they choose to cry in front of others; but it is still important to remember that every man is unique in the way he approaches his own healing.

Cultural expectations and social conditioning may be the greatest obstacles for men to grieve in a healthy way. Our culture discourages men from openly emoting. For men, crying can feel like defeat and a weakness, which often results in feelings of shame.

Common cultural expectations of men include:

- Being strong and in control
- Being rational and logical
- Being confident and assertive
- Being able to endure stress and pain
- Being able to handle things on their own
- Being competitive and fearless
- Remaining task-oriented

Two common threads for men in grief are anger and feeling the need for physical expressions of grief. Although anger is a normal and healthy response within the course of grief's journey, being stuck in anger for too long can have deleterious health consequences.

Men who deny and repress their feelings of grief may suffer significant long-term problems such as major depression, anxiety, withdrawal and low self-esteem. Many experience indifference within their relationships, complain of physical ailments such as headaches, fatigue and backaches, and some may turn to chemical dependence for relief.

## **How to Support a Man Who is Grieving**

Be patient and let go of expectations as to how a man should grieve. There is no one "right" way to mourn a loss. Just because a man is more silent does not mean he isn't grieving or that he doesn't care. A man's way of healing may be less visible, less social, and/or more restrained. Many men respond to their loss more cognitively – wanting to understand what happened, or the grief process itself, or focusing on ways to move on. And they often prefer space and time alone, which can be a source of disconnect or misunderstanding with respect to the women in his life. Those women are likely to have an apparently opposite response, wanting more connection with others in the wake of a great loss.

It is important to support a man right where he is in his own grieving process. A man is likely to find ways to connect with the pain he feels with an action he can take. It is easier for many men to “do” than to “be”. Encouraging a man to “do something” to honor their loved one can help him express his grief. For example, a father who recently lost a son who had loved baseball went out with some male friends and built a baseball diamond in honor of the son.

Many men will find it very helpful to talk with other men. Men's support groups can make a huge difference and a man's interest in one can be a sign of courage and willingness to heal.

### **A Father's Grief**

By Eileen Knight Hagemeister

It must be very difficult to be a man in grief.  
Since "men don't cry" and "men are strong", no tears can bring relief.

It must be very difficult to stand up to the test.  
And field calls and visitors so that she can get some rest.

They always ask if she's alright and what she's going through.  
But seldom take his hand and ask, "My friend, how are you?"

He hears her cry in the night and thinks his heart will break.  
And dries her tears and comforts her but "stays strong" for her sake.

It must be very difficult to start each day anew.  
And try to be so very brave, he lost his baby too.