Working Through the Stages of Grief

We grieve in distinct stages. Although these steps generally unfold in a particular order, often we take two steps forward and a few back. One moment we may feel angry, and the next, we begin crying or laughing. Our feelings are never right or wrong. The four primary stages of grief are:

1. Denial/shock
   Numbness occurs and we feel that the news we have received is somehow a mistake. Our first response is very often “No, there must be a mix up.” Denial often gets negative publicity, but it does have an important function. Denial protects us until we have a chance to process information. Denial only becomes problematic if it is present too long and in the face of overwhelming realities.

2. Anger/feeling deserted
   During this phase, we often become angry with the person who left us. Our language is filled with “If only he had worn his seatbelt.” or “I wish he had taken better care of himself.” Often times during this stage, we blame the events or illness. We struggle with spirituality and wonder how a higher power could let this occur. No matter how confusing anger is, it becomes a necessary and healthy adjustment and demonstrates that we are moving through the grief process.

3. Despair/depression
   This feeling can follow the wave of anger. We become sad and feel despondent. Small tasks and concentrating can seem insurmountable. Despair and depression signal to us that the loss is real and is a healthy sign we are not in denial.

4. Acceptance/adjustment
   When we have enough time to heal, we begin to accept what has transpired and we can make sense of it. This hindsight is often filled with memories of positive and happy times. When we accept the situation, it does not mean we do not feel the loss, it simply means we are able to balance the loss and move forward.

Working through Grief

- Take care of yourself; grief can wear you out. Get plenty of rest and eat properly. Do not drink, use drugs or medicate your feelings.
- Accept your feelings as right for you.
- Express your feelings. Don’t keep them bottled up.
- Don’t make major life decisions while grieving.
- Let yourself grieve at your own pace.
- Know when to seek help. There are intense feelings associated with grief. However, if you are concerned that you are taking too much time to pull through these feelings, seek assistance from a counselor, pastor or rabbi, family or friend. Call your EAP (800.236.3231) for additional support.