

## STAGES OF THE GRIEF RESPONSE

### *Three Stages of Grief:*

#### **1. Impact**

The initial reaction to death is that of the Impact stage. This phase is characterized by numbed, stunned and shocked feelings. The person is unable to come to grips with what has happened; he feels suspended from life. Usually the bereaved experience a restricted field of attention and are indifferent to their immediate needs. Often there is denial and a refusal to believe that the deceased is gone. Generally the person is not in touch with his own emotions although he may appear afraid. There is often somatic distress such as choking, shortness of breath, sighing, weakness and poor digestion.

The impact stage is the one where maximum stress is experienced. The time orientation of the bereaved is the immediate present. He is temporarily cut off from both his past and his future and can only deal with the present. This stage varies in length from a few hours to a month or even 6 months or more.

#### **2. Recoil**

When the initial shock and numbness of the impact phase begins to lift, the person experiences the first awareness of what has happened. Now the loss is felt most acutely and the bereaved feels restless, tense, and in turmoil. Now the first overt expression of emotion occurs. Anger, protest, restless irritability, irrational feelings, sometimes bitterness both toward others and at one's self, and guilt are feelings that are experienced. There is usually also a need to talk and ventilate. During this stage there will be acute periods of loneliness and often times a childlike attitude of dependency, wanting to be cared for and looked after. This is the time when there is an intense yearning and urge to recover the deceased. This manifests itself in many ways: preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased, a clear visual memory of the deceased, a sense of the presence of the deceased, calling and crying for the lost person, and even a conscious recognition of this urge to search for the deceased by going to his/her grave or places where he/she had been. Usually during this phase the bereaved will need to be with others and to have a stable, supporting environment. However, the initiative will usually have to be on the part of others. It is very easy to remain at this stage, to become fixated here. Furthermore this is a very crucial period and the response of other persons is of critical significance for the bereaved person's future.

The time orientation of the bereaved has now shifted to the past or immediate past. The length of this stage varies for one month to a year or longer.

#### **3. Recovery**

This phase of the grief response entails getting back to normal insofar as that is possible. The person begins to feel the stress is passed and has come to face the matters of everyday living in the new environment without the deceased. The permanence and fact of the loss are accepted, and the attempts to recover the deceased are given up. The bereaved now has to develop a new set of functioning roles which involves letting go of the past and the building of a new life.

