

Anticipatory Grief

A lot has been written and shared about the predictable stages of the grief that we experience after suffering a significant loss. What's not as widely discussed is what's known as "anticipatory grief" – **the feelings and reactions we experience before an anticipated loss.** They too are quite common and universal.

A "loss" can present itself in different forms: a diagnosis of a terminal illness, an announcement of layoffs or a plant closing, a notice about eviction or foreclosure, a partner filing for divorce, or the knowledge that our children will be going away to school, camp or moving out on their own.

Whatever defines a loss in your life, you should know that it's normal to have a number of reactions. Having time to think about a projected loss can add to the level of emotional response—and not knowing exactly what may happen often leads to a state of limbo that is very challenging.

What to expect:

- **Experiencing grief stages** – In anticipation of a loss, you may feel shock, denial, depression, bargaining, guilt and perhaps acceptance, much as you would *after* a loss.
- **Denial can be particularly strong** – The event hasn't happened yet, so often we cling to the hope for a miracle.
- **Avoidance is very common** – It's natural for us to put off or delay facing painful emotions.
- **Strained relationships** – Communication with those you care about may be tense, especially if you are in different stages of grief. Some may want to talk and deal with it, while others may want to deny or avoid it.
- **An emotional roller-coaster** – Emotions can be quite extreme, running the gamut from hope to depression.

A few do's and don'ts:

- **DO** know that the projected loss is real. The feelings experienced are valid and quite normal – be kind to yourself and to others going through anticipatory grief.
- **DO** seek support and comfort from your social network of friends, family and community.
- **DO** allow yourself the opportunity to bring closure to situations or relationships while you can.
- **DO** live each day to the fullest and appreciate what you have while you still have it.
- **DO** express your feelings to those you can trust.
- **DO** seek comfort from your faith, religion & beliefs.
- **DON'T** judge yourself or others harshly if you are struggling with your anticipated grief.
- **DON'T** isolate yourself too much or shut others out.
- **DON'T** seek escape through dangerous or addictive behaviors (drinking, gambling, etc.).
- **DON'T** deprive yourself of the things and experiences that bring you pleasure.

Your EAP is here for you.

We're available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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