

# Variables to Your Grieving Process

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Your grieving process is unique because it is YOURS. There are many reasons, many variables, for the differences in your grief. The reasons for the differences may include:

- Social
- Intellectual
- Spiritual
- Physical
- Emotional
- Financial

Some of the variables may include:

**Age** – Age makes a difference in our ability to understand death, dying, the future, problems, opportunities, our ability to get around (i.e., going to stores, meetings, church, etc).

**Gender** – Men may grieve quite differently than women due to stereotypical roles/rules or perceived social expectations, such as “Men don’t cry”; “Men don’t know how to shop for food, do laundry, housework”; “Women don’t know how to pay the bills, do taxes, fix the car.”

**Life Experiences** – How have you dealt with other losses/deaths in your life? When did these losses/deaths occur? Is this your first experience with the death of a loved one? If you’ve experienced grief before, you know what the *normal* experience for you is, such as concentration and/or memory problems (short- or long- term). When the right side of the brain is overloaded with feelings and emotions, the left side, which is the cognitive/thinking side, has a difficult time functioning. So, you may leave the stove on, lose your keys or other important items. Grief support groups can help you learn what is *normal* in grief.

**Individual personality, coping skills, adjustment** – Are you the type that holds your feelings and concerns inside? Or, do you talk or scream them out for others to hear? Or, perhaps you are the type who

works your feelings and stay busy to keep from feeling. Are you the type who will ask for help, ask questions, and is willing to learn? Or, are you the type who will work it out in your own way?

**Family communications, myths and attitudes about loss/death** – Is it OK in your family to talk about death and issues surrounding death and dying?

**Cultural background and current environment** – Whatever your family’s cultural background, Italian, German, Jewish, etc., there are many different rituals and expectations about how you are *expected* to grieve, based on stereotypes and family expectations. As a child, you learned the grieving style of significant adults and as an adult, this will make a difference as to how you allow or expect yourself to grieve now.

**Health** – Are you in good physical health or do you have chronic pain or illness? This can deplete your emotional energy as well as make your grieving process more difficult. Since the death happened, do you find you are having aches and pains? This is very common. Make an appointment for a complete physical to relieve yourself of negative thoughts and fears.

**Support system** – Do you have good friends and family who will allow you to grieve YOUR way, who support you with love, caring, and space? Does your church support your grief? Does your community have a support group for those who are bereaved?

**Financial resources** – Were there a lot of medical bills to be sent to medicare, Medicaid, insurance companies? Will your portion of the bills overwhelm you? Was there a will? Were there insurance monies to help with the bills? Do you have a good accountant and/or lawyer to assist

you through the tax and legal issues? Will you have income? Will you have to go to work? Do you know what is available in your community?

**Relationship with the deceased** – Are there secondary losses due to the death? For example, a widow/widower not only loses a mate, but also a partner in raising children, or loses a home due to financial constraints. What kind of relationship did you have with the deceased? What was your last experience with the deceased like? How did the person who died influence your life? How much of your day was involved in caring or being with them? How much did this person do for you?

**Preparedness for the death** – Did you have time to say goodbye and things, such as “I love you” or “Please forgive me”? If you didn’t have time, take the time now and write them a “goodbye letter” and send it symbolically to the deceased, as one child did by digging a hole beside the grave and burying the letter, or attach it to a helium balloon and let it float into the sky.

**Nature of the death** – Where did the death take place? Was it sudden or expected? If it was expected, did the time before death last a few hours, days or weeks? Were you provided with information from medical professionals to help you understand what was happening? Was the death a suicide, leaving lots of questions, fears, guilt, anger, etc? Was the death a homicide or perhaps due to a car accident, or a drunk driver? If so, was there a lot of anger and unanswered questions?

These are just a few of the variables and the issues that surround them that can create differences in YOUR grieving process. ♦