

C I S D C A T A L O G



ACTION PLAN FOR CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING (CISD)



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INTRODUCTION

This packet describes the role of H & H Health Associates in response to urgent or traumatic situations requiring Employee Assistance (EAP) involvement as it relates to critical incident stress debriefings.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the critical incident stress debriefing procedure is to mitigate the impact of a critical incident and to accelerate normal recovery in people with normal reactions to **ABNORMAL** events.

DEFINITION:

A critical incident is any situation faced by individuals which causes unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with their ability to function.

Specifically, almost any incident in which the circumstances presented or witnessed are so distressing as to produce a high level of immediate or delayed emotional reaction that surpasses the “normal” coping mechanisms of the individual.

CONSEQUENCES:

The two kinds of typical consequences to trauma are:

- Re-experiencing the event, as if the incident is happening again, including constant intrusive thoughts, or anxiety about the event reoccurring.
- Withdrawal or denial of the event. An attempt is made to avoid feeling or thinking about the event, to escape or cover up by using addictions, busying oneself, or not fulfilling work or personal obligations.

THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT DEBRIEFING

1. The **Debriefing** is a psychological and educational process, it is not a group counseling session.
 - It mitigates the impact of the critical incident.
 - It accelerates normal recovery in normal people with normal reactions to abnormal events.
2. The debriefing should include **ALL** who are involved in the incident.
3. The debriefing is led by a facilitator: the Employee Assistance Specialist from H & H Health Associates.
4. The debriefing should take place 48 to 72 hours after the incident. The EAP Specialist will lead the session and help manage the group and assist any participant who might have to leave the room due to an emotional reaction.
5. The following format is a general overview of the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Procedure (CISD):
 - The debriefing should take place in a neutral environment that is free from distractions.
 - All employees involved in the incident should be invited to attend, but do not have to speak.
 - Employees should be free from duties.
 - There should be no note taking, recording, or media present.
 - The debriefing is fully confidential.
 - The purpose is not to find fault, place blame, critique, investigate, or discuss procedure violations.
 - Employees should speak only from their own experiences.
 - CISD team members will remain after the meetings.

6. The pre-debriefing meeting:

- The EAP Specialist will arrive at the scheduled meeting place 30 to 40 minutes early.

- The EAP Specialist will speak with management to “get the scoop”, “gossip” of:
 - ✓ What happened?
 - ✓ Who is most upset?
 - ✓ What is the tension level?
 - ✓ What is the general feeling?

THE EAP SPECIALIST'S INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPANTS

1. The EAP Specialist will explain to the participants that the purpose of the debriefing is to **facilitate coping** with the stress of the incident.
2. The EAP Specialist will **go over** the ground rules:
 - Explain that everything said during the session is **confidential**.
 - Ask that those who are wearing pagers turn them off in order to **minimize distractions**.
 - Tell the group there will be **no breaks** and that if anyone needs to **leave** the room to do so **quietly** and to return.
 - Explain to the group that a person does not have to talk. They can “**PASS**”, but it is recommended that they participate because participation can lead to:
 - ✓ feeling better
 - ✓ eating better
 - ✓ better family relationships
 - ✓ resuming normal activities on and off the job
 - ✓ staying focused on tasks
 - ✓ regaining ability to concentrate
 - The EAP Specialist will explain and emphasize to participants they are to **talk only about themselves** and not about someone else.
 - The EAP Specialist will reinforce that this is a debriefing to deal with the emotional impact of the incident, and **not an operational critique**.

**CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS
DEBRIEFING (CISD)
GUIDELINES
FOR
PEOPLE IN
LEADERSHIP POSITIONS**

Leadership's Role

At some point in our lives most of us will be faced with some type of critical incident. Either ourselves personally or someone we manage may be affected by an unexpected, perhaps violent event that causes suffering and loss.

Any incident in which the circumstances are so upsetting that a high level of emotional reaction is produced and goes beyond the realm of normal stress can fall into the category of critical incident.

As managers, we may work with an employee who has been a victim of a violent crime, an automobile accident or a suicide. On the job there may be an accident, a natural disaster, a robbery or an unexpected death.

All of these incidents would have the potential of impacting an entire work group and you need to be prepared to help others to deal effectively with the crisis.

As managers, you have a great deal of influence over how people react to an event in the workplace and your support and direction during a stressful time can make all the difference. Once a critical incident has occurred you must act quickly.

As a leader, keep in mind the following 3 responsibilities:

1. TAKE CHARGE AND DIRECT AN EFFECTIVE, IMMEDIATE RESPONSE.

Each leader should have a plan of action for their particular group. You should know who to call, where to go and what to do. This must be worked out prior to a critical incident with the help of management and H & H Health Associates Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

The plan should include what to tell employees and how to tell employees about actions needed, and note who is responsible for this activity. The plan should identify potential emotional responses as well as debrief the first responders and the affected employees. Include in the plan the involvement of the EAP for individual and group meetings.

Since the organization's phone lines may be tied-up or even out of service, cell phones should be available for employees to contact worried family members.

2. CREATE A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT.

Leaders must first understand that most responses are normal reactions to an abnormal amount of stress. They may include physical signs and symptoms, such as:

- Headaches
- Queasiness
- Physical Pains
- Sleeplessness

Changes in behavior such as:

- Irritability
- Lack of motivation
- Increase in alcohol or drug use
- Anxiousness
- Crying spells
- Withdrawal

Some people may choose to stop the pain and deny that they have been affected. As we know, this is not a healthy way to deal with a trauma and individuals need to be encouraged to express their feelings.

This leads us into the discussion of creating a healthy environment where people feel comfortable and are encouraged to discuss their reactions to the incident. It is important that as soon as possible after a critical incident those involved be directed away from the site to a neutral setting. An individual should have some recovery time before detailed interviewing takes place. The detailed interviewing should take place in a private, secure setting.

- What's needed:
 - ✓ A debriefing for all involved employees facilitated by H & H Health Associates.
 - ✓ Management's participating in this debriefing to show their support.
- Notification to H & H Health Associates EAP as soon as possible to set up the debriefing. (Optimal within 72 hours of the event)
- Follow-up debriefing sessions should be determined by the EAP.
- A debriefing usually involves several components including:
 - ✓ Education about the normal emotional responses that employees can expect after the incident.
 - ✓ An opportunity for employees to talk about what they saw, what they did, what they thought and what they felt about the incident.
 - ✓ An assurance of confidentiality.

As we know, management plays a significant role in the debriefing process. When discussing a critical incident, management sets the mood and environmental tone. The debriefing serves as a way of defusing the initial emotional reaction to the incident. By conducting the debriefing as a group with management present, employees feel they are important. They also feel they are not alone and that it is okay to express feelings. This tends to decrease feelings of shame or isolation for those experiencing extreme or unfamiliar reactions or feelings. The debriefing is often the starting point of an ongoing process of monitoring employees' ability to work through the event.

**3. REFER TO H & H HEALTH ASSOCIATES EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)
(1-800-832-8302 or 314-845-8302)**

A lot of the symptoms you may see in an employee could be part of the normal healing process. The key in determining if your employee needs additional help is the intensity of the symptoms (can the employee perform their job?), and the duration of the symptoms (have the symptoms lasted more than a few weeks?)

It is important that you call the EAP office and consult with H & H Health Associates if you have any concerns. This, of course, is handled in a confidential manner.

**Possible Symptoms
Listed below**

Listed below are some of the symptoms you may see in an employee who is showing signs that a referral to the EAP is appropriate and necessary:

- ✓ Marked personality change
- ✓ Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- ✓ Strange or grandiose ideas
- ✓ Excessive anxiety
- ✓ Prolonged depression or apathy
- ✓ Marked changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- ✓ Thinking or talking about suicide
- ✓ Extreme highs or lows
- ✓ Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- ✓ Excessive anger, hostility, or violent behavior
- ✓ Severe mood swings
- ✓ Lack of personal hygiene
- ✓ Extreme weight loss or gain
- ✓ Forgetfulness/inability to concentrate

It is important for you to observe your employee. Often you are the person who knows his or her performance and can successfully intervene. The goal for any leader after a critical incident has occurred is to assure each employee to get the help that is needed.

(Text of a possible memo to Employees)

Date

Dear Employees:

As you know, there was a serious XXXXX in our facility today. (Name) was XXXX while XXXXXXXX. He/she is currently in XXXXX hospital in XXXXXXX condition. We have engaged the services of H & H Health Associates, our EAP provider, who has extensive experience in trauma services to help you with any assistance needed as a result of this traumatic event.

People who have undergone traumatic events experience normal psychological consequences to varying degrees. To help mitigate these consequences, a Critical Incident Debriefing will be held from XXXXXX to XXXXXX at our XXXXXXX facility for all of our employees. During the Debriefing, each person will have an opportunity to discuss their participation in this event and to learn more about these predictable psychological consequences that you may now be experiencing, or may experience in the future. For individual help from our EAP, please call them at 314-845-8302 or 1-800-832-8302.

We at (Company) value our employees and view this professional Debriefing service as another tool to help us through this traumatic event.

Sincerely,

**POTENTIALLY
TRAUMATIZING EVENTS**

INDIVIDUAL

1. Automobile accident
2. Sexual assault/abuse
3. Any life threatening experience
4. Robbery
5. Serious physical injury/abuse
6. Perception of serious threat to self or significant other
7. Psychological abuse
8. Severe injury/death of one's own child
9. Suicide of family member or co-worker
10. Homicide
11. Line of duty injury or death among law enforcement or other first responders
12. Multiple homicides within a community
13. Injury or death to a child
14. Observing any of the individual or community trauma listed above.

COMMUNITY

1. Earthquake
2. Hurricane
3. Fires
4. Flood
5. Large scale environmental pollution
6. Multiple injury/fatality accidents
7. Terrorism
8. Child related traumatic events
9. Homicides in the community
10. High publicity crimes of violence or sex
11. Community wide disasters

HOW DO YOU COPE WITH STRESS?

Directions: There are many ways to cope with the stress in your life. Some coping techniques are more effective than others. The purpose of this checklist is to help you assess how effectively you cope with the stress. Upon completing this checklist, you will have identified many of the ways you choose to cope with stress, while at the same time, through a point system, ascertain the relative desirability of the coping techniques that you now employ. This is a health education survey, not a clinical assessment instrument. Its sole purpose is to inform you of how you cope with the stress in your life.

In order to complete the checklist, simply follow the instructions given for each of the 14 items listed below. When you have completed all of the 14 items, place your total score in the space provided.

- _____ 1. Give yourself 10 points if you feel that you have a supportive family.
- _____ 2. Give yourself 10 points if you actively pursue a hobby.
- _____ 3. Give yourself 10 points if you belong to some social or activity group that meets at least once a month (other than your family).
- _____ 4. Give yourself 15 points if you are within 5 pounds of your "ideal" body weight, considering your height and bone structure.
- _____ 5. Give yourself 15 points if you practice some form of "deep relaxation" at least 3 times a week. Deep relaxation exercises include mediation, imagery, yoga, etc.
- _____ 6. Give yourself 5 points for each time you exercise 30 minutes or longer during the course of an average week.
- _____ 7. Give yourself 5 points for each nutritionally balanced and wholesome meal you consume during the course of an average day.
- _____ 8. Give yourself 10 points for each time you do something that you really enjoy, "just for yourself," during the course of an average week.
- _____ 9. Give yourself 10 points if you have some place in your home that you can go to in order to relax and/or be by yourself.
- _____ 10. Give yourself 10 points if you practice time management techniques in your daily life.
- _____ 11. Subtract 10 points for each pack of cigarettes you smoke during the course of average day.
- _____ 12. Subtract 5 points for each evening during the course of an average week that you take any form of medication or chemical substance (including alcohol) to help you sleep.
- _____ 13. Subtract 10 points for each day during the course of an average week that you consume any form of medication or chemical substance (including alcohol) to reduce your anxiety or just calm you down.
- _____ 14. Subtract 5 points for each evening during the course of an average week that you bring work home; work that was meant to be done at your place of employment.

_____ **Total Score**

TRAUMATIC STRESS AWARENESS

Remember the last significant critical incident to which you were exposed. Using the list below, indicate which symptom you experienced, if any, and how long they persisted.

1. Nightmares (more than once/week) _____
2. Intrusive memories (more than once/day) _____
3. Irritability _____
4. Difficulty concentrating _____
5. Anger/hostility _____
6. Fear and/or avoidance of similar situations _____
7. Avoidance of people or things that remind you of the critical incident _____
8. Stress-related physical complaints _____
9. Flashbacks _____
10. Withdrawal from usual activities _____
11. Feeling “numb” or detached _____
12. Depressed mood _____
13. Feeling guilty _____
14. Feeling anxious _____
15. Feeling as though the world no longer “makes sense” _____
16. Questioning religious values _____
17. Hyper vigilance _____
18. Exaggerated startle response _____
19. Difficulty sleeping _____
20. Difficulty remembering the critical incident _____
21. Feeling estranged from your body _____
22. Feeling estranged from your surroundings _____

IDENTIFYING YOUR MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS OF DISTRESS

Most people know when they are experiencing excessive levels of stress arousal. The manner in which we are alerted to, such as a condition of distress, may be through the development of symptoms of excessive stress. Listed below are numerous potentially stress-related symptoms that people experience. Read through the list and check your most common symptoms of distress putting a check in the column indicating how often you experience each.

“When I am under a great deal of stress, I experience:”			
	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
1. Headaches			
2. Irregular heartbeats			
3. Muscle spasms			
4. Gastrointestinal problems			
5. Vertigo			
6. High blood pressure			
7. Low blood pressure			
8. Fatigue			
9. Difficulty concentrating			
10. Feeling overwhelmed			
11. Anger, irritability			
12. Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep			
13. Sadness/depression			
14. Increased appetite			
15. Decreased appetite			
16. Rashes or hives			
17. Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness			
18. Apathy			
19. Increased use of alcohol and/or tobacco			
20. Cynicism, negativism			

EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF POSSIBLE PTSD

- Dissociation
- Traumatic dreams
- Memory disturbances
- Persistent intrusive recollections of the trauma
- Self-medication (e.g., alcohol abuse, prescription drug misuse)
- Anger, irritability, hostility which is difficult to control
- Persistent depression, withdrawal
- A “dazed” or “numb” appearance
- Panic attacks
- Phobia formation

POTENTIAL POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS SYMPTOMS

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Complex partial seizures
- Depression
- Self-medicating, substance abuse
- Erratic work-related behavior
- Memory dysfunction without traumatic amnesia
- Amnesiac syndromes regarding traumatization

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING THINGS TO TRY:

- WITHIN THE FIRST 24 - 48 HOURS periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time; keep busy.
- Know that you're normal having normal reactions; don't label yourself crazy.
- Talk to people; talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of *numbing* the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate life with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out; people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible, i.e. sleeping, eating.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible that will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer them even if you're not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't try to fight reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks--these are normal and will decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that he is "lucky it wasn't worse;" a traumatized person is not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)

4 Intervention Styles

	Timing	Place	Group Size	Leader	Duration	Who	Purpose	Comments
Demobilization	Immediately after shifts released	2 rooms, away from event	100+	Peer, Chaplain, Mental Health	10 min + 20 minutes for food & rest	Operations teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Assess well-being *Give info on stress *Announcement by management 	Rare; Not for: routine, small events, line of duty death
Crisis Management Briefings	Anytime post-crisis	Large enough rooms(s) for group size	Up to 300	Peer, Chaplain, Mental Health	30-45 minutes	Homogeneous groups of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Rumor control *Reduce chaos *Facilitate follow up *Engender cohesion 	NOT therapy Need “authority figure” plus trained CISM
Defusing	Within 8 hours of event – after it’s over	Neutral environment, free of distractions, away from the scene	Up to 25; usually groups of 6 to 8, 2 CISM members	Peer, Chaplain, Mental Health	20-45 minutes	Employees close to event Management attends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Process the event *Increase normal functioning *Establish linkages and future expectations 	Simpler than CISM; More immediate; NOT into emotions
CISD	1-10 days; Post crisis 3 – 4 weeks for mass disasters	Neutral environment free of distractions, away from the scene	Up to 25 1-5 ratio leader to employee 2 CISM Members	At least 1 mental health and Peer, Chaplain	1-1/2 to 3 hours	Anyone; Organized groups homogeneously, eg. those closest to event, next closest, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Education and venting *Normalize feelings *Follow-up *For major events 	Peer, mental health CISM Need to use model and be trained. Steps: intro, facts, thoughts, reactions, symptoms, teaching, re-entry, deeper emotions.

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEETS

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident (any event that causes unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with the ability to function normally). Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite *normal*, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, a few months, or longer, depending on the severity of the traumatic event. The understanding and the support of loved ones usually cause the stress reactions to pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

Here are some common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

Physical	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
Chills	Confusion	Fear	Withdrawal
Thirst	Nightmares	Guilt	Antisocial acts
Fatigue	Uncertainty	Grief	Inability to rest
Nausea	Hyper vigilance	Panic	Intensified pacing
Twitches	Intrusive images	Anxiety	Change in social activity
Vomiting	Blaming someone	Agitation	Change in speech patterns
Dizziness	Poor problem solving	Irritability	Loss or increase of appetite
Weakness	Poor abstract thinking	Depression	Hyper alert to environment
Chest pain	Poor attention/decisions	Intense anger	Increased alcohol consumption
Headaches	Poor concentration/memory	Apprehension	Change in usual communications
Elevated blood pressure	Disorientation: of time, place, or person	Emotional shock	
Rapid heart rate	Difficulty identifying objects or people	Emotional outbursts	
Muscle tremors	Heightened or lowered alertness	Feeling overwhelmed	
Shock symptoms	Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings	Loss of emotional control	
Grinding of teeth			
Visual difficulties			
Profuse sweating			

GRIEF AND LOSS

Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. Whether the loss involves the death of a loved one, the end of a special relationship, or becoming disabled--and whether the person is a senior citizen, or a college student--anyone can experience loss and grief. Individual grief reactions can vary widely, not only from person to person, but also within the same person over time.

REACTIONS TO LOSS

People who are grieving will experience many reactions to their loss as they work toward resolution. At various times, especially at first, you may experience intense and sometimes conflicting feelings or may deny that the loss has occurred. Strong feelings such as sadness, helplessness, loneliness, guilt, or anger can emerge. Experiencing and accepting these feelings as natural is a part of the recovery process. Ultimately, you reach a point where the loss becomes integrated into your set of life experiences.

Throughout the recovery period you will experience many reactions. some of the following reactions may indeed be experienced *many times*:

1. **Denial, shock, numbness:** reactions which distance you from the loss, thereby protecting you from being overwhelmed by emotions.
2. **Emotional releases:** these reactions accompany realizations of different aspects of the loss, they frequently involve much crying and are important to the healing process.
3. **Reactive depression:** natural feelings beyond sadness (e.g. feelings of loneliness, isolation, hopelessness, self pity) which occur as the person recognizes the extent of the loss.
4. **Panic:** feeling overwhelmed, confused, fearful, unable to cope and even believing something is wrong with oneself.
5. **Remorse:** following a loss (death, relationship breakup or disability), you sometimes become preoccupied with thoughts of what you might have done differently to have prevented the loss or to have made things better. This can be helpful as you try to make sense out of your situation, but it can also lead to unrealistic feelings of remorse or guilt.
6. **Anger:** This is a frequent response to a perception of injustice and powerlessness. A significant loss can threaten your basic beliefs about yourself, or about life in general. As a result, you can feel anger not only at a person perceived as responsible for the loss, or at God or life in general for the injustice of the loss, but also, in cases of loss through death, at the deceased for dying.

Suggestions for Coping With Grief

Different kinds of losses dictate different responses, and no two people grieve alike; what works for one may not work for another. The emphasis here is upon specific, practical ideas.

- ***Talk regularly with a friend.*** Talking with another about what you think and feel is one of the best things you can do for yourself. It helps relieve some of the pressure you may feel, it can give you a sense of perspective, and it keeps you in touch with others.
- ***Eat healthy and exercise.*** Eat balanced meals, for your diet affects how you think and feel as well as how your body acts. Eat even if you're not hungry. Eat regular meals rather than just snacking. Avoid too much fat. Exercise. Flex your muscles, stretch your body, expand your lungs, go for a walk, and keep your routine at the gym. Exercise releases chemicals in the brain that combat stress and depression.
- ***Keep a journal.*** Write out your thoughts and feelings. Do this whenever you feel the urge, but do it at least several times a week, if not several times a day. ***Do not*** censor what you write, be just as honest as you can. In time, go back through your writing and notice how you're changing and growing.
- ***Allow yourself to cry.*** Crying goes naturally with grief. Tears may come when you least expect them. This may feel awkward to you, but this is not unusual. A good rule of thumb is: if you feel like crying, then cry. If not, then don't. Some grieving people seldom cry--it's just their way.
- ***Allow yourself to laugh.*** Sometimes something funny will happen to you, just like it used to. You may recall something hilarious that happened in the past. When that happens, go ahead and laugh if it feels funny to you. You won't dishonor your loved one's memory.
- ***Vent your anger rather than hold it in.*** You may feel awkward being angry when you're grieving, but anger is a common reaction. Find ways to get it out of your system: yell, even if it's an empty house, cry, hit something soft, throw eggs at something hard, vacuum up a storm. Resist the temptation to be proper.
- ***Structure your alone time.*** You may have had your fill of alone time, in which case you'll want to ignore this suggestion. But if you're often among family, friends and colleagues, make sure you also have time all by yourself. Allow yourself the opportunity to go inside yourself to discover your thoughts, feelings, memories, hopes and dreams.

HELPING YOURSELF HEAL WHEN SOMEONE CLOSE DIES

- **Allow yourself to mourn.**

Someone you love has died and you are now faced with the difficult, but important, need to mourn. Mourning is the open expression of your thoughts and feelings regarding the death of the person who has died. It is an essential part of healing.
- **Realize your grief is unique.**

No one will grieve in exactly the same way. You will grieve in your own special way. Don't try to compare your experience with that of other people. Don't adopt assumptions about how long your grief should last. Consider taking a "one day at a time" approach that allows you to grieve at your own pace.
- **Talk about your grief.**

Express your grief openly. By sharing your grief outside yourself, healing occurs. Ignoring your grief won't make it go away. Allow yourself to speak from your heart, not just your head. Doing so doesn't mean you are losing control, or going "crazy". It is a normal part of your grief journey. You have a right to express your grief, no one has the right to take it away.
- **Expect to feel a multitude of emotions.**

Experiencing a loss affects your head, heart and spirit. Confusion, disorganization, fear, guilt relief of explosive emotions are just a few of the emotions you may feel. Sometimes these emotions will follow each other within a short period of time, or they may occur simultaneously. Don't be surprised if out of nowhere you suddenly experience surges of grief, even at the most unexpected times. These grief attacks can be frightening and leave you feeling overwhelmed. They are, however, a natural response to the death of someone loved. Find someone who understands your feelings and who will allow you to talk about them.
- **Allow for numbness.**

Feeling dazed or numb when someone dies is often part of your early grief experience. This numbness gives your emotions time to catch up with what your mind has told you. This feeling helps create insulation from the reality of the death until you are more able to tolerate what you don't want to believe.
- **Be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.**

Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you fatigued. Your low energy level may naturally slow you down. Nurture yourself, get daily rest, and eat balanced meals. Lighten your schedule as much as possible. Caring for yourself doesn't mean feeling sorry for yourself, it means you are using survival skills.
- **Develop a support system.**

Reaching out to others and accepting support is often difficult, particularly when you hurt so much. The most compassionate self-action you can do at this difficult time is to find a support system of caring friends and relatives who will provide the understanding you need. Find those people who encourage you to be yourself and acknowledge your feelings - both happy and sad.

- **Make use of ritual.**

The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. Most importantly, the funeral is a way for you to express your grief outside yourself. If you eliminate this ritual, you often set yourself up to repress your feelings, which, in turn, may cause negative effects in your physical and emotional healing.

- **Allow a search for meaning.**

You may find yourself asking "Why did s/he die?" "Why this way?" "Why now?" This search for meaning is another normal part of the healing process. Some questions have answers, some do not. The healing occurs in the opportunity to pose the questions, not necessarily in answering them.

If you are angry at your Higher Power because of the death of a loved one, realize this feeling as a normal part of your grief work. Find a supportive friend who will listen responsively as you explore your feelings and search for meaning.

- **Treasure memories.**

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after someone loved dies. Treasure them and share them with your family and friends.

- **Move toward your grief and heal.**

You can't heal unless you openly express your grief. Denying your grief will only make it become more confusing and overwhelming. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself.