

**Dear All**

## **SAYING GOODBYE TO SOMEONE YOU LOVE**

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Death is a normal and inevitable part of everyone's life. Yet few of us are prepared to deal effectively with someone who is dying. Very often we are left feeling powerless and helpless. There is a sense that there is little we can do to make a difference during this time.

AIDS has caused many people to confront the issues of death and dying earlier than they ever expected to. A death from AIDS is especially tragic as it cuts people down in the prime of their life often before they've realized their hopes and dreams. This creates a very profound sadness.

Death is rarely easy. This brochure is intended to help you through one of the most difficult parts of life, and help your loved one have a quality death.

The end of life is a time for trying to settle differences and for completing unfinished business. Spend time with your loved one whether crying, laughing or silently holding hands. These experiences will provide rich and beautiful memories.

It's not unusual to become aware of one's own mortality when someone we love is dying. Death destroys the illusion that we have "enough time." Use what time you have left to do things together you both enjoy, and to say the things that have been left unsaid between you.

Our illness or someone else's' can make us question the nature of life. We may become angry at God. It's okay. Remember, God is big enough to survive our anger.

Take stock of spiritual beliefs and strengthen them. God or whatever higher power we may believe in often is a source of comfort, healing and tranquility.

Everyone dies differently and as they need to. Some people die fighting, others have given up, and still others may die pretending they are not dying. Allow your loved ones to face their final moments as they wish to. Remember there is no right or wrong way to die.

Denying that you're dying is common. If this doesn't hurt anyone, don't try to take this away from the person who is dying. After all, what have you got to replace this denial with?

Many people die in character, often exactly how they lived. Not everyone can meet death in a noble or heroic way. There is integrity to dying in one's own way.

Understand that your loved one may fear dying, or even welcome it. Allow those feelings.

Dying can be very different from our expectations. Don't mold the reality of the moment into a romantic idea of what it should be. Despite how difficult it is, be there and remain real!

Someone who is dying may be very angry and striking out inappropriately at those who are closest to him or her. Understand this and try not to take it personally.

Though a normal part of life, death can sometimes look, sound and smell ugly. Prepare yourself and move on. Try not to let this interfere with the relationship you have with the person who is dying. Don't let the pain get in the way of your love and being there.

Dying people still have hope: of not suffering any more, of being remembered, of an afterlife. Support that

hope. They may not have anything else at this time.

The dying have special needs. Sometimes they need to plan their own funerals or make other arrangements. Find out whether you could be helpful in carrying out these last wishes.

Sometimes a dying person needs to give away things that he or she has cherished in the hope of helping keep their memory alive.

Some people choose to die at home surrounded by those they love. Others prefer or are forced to die in hospitals or hospices.

What can you do for someone during their last weeks or days, their final moments? Tell him what he means to you, what you've learned from him. Tell her when you will think about her. Reminisce about the wonderful, funny or hard times you've shared.

Touch and hold him. Understand that all we have between people are moments; moments of loving, of sharing, of being close and being understood.

Dying is the final part of living. It may be the ultimate life crisis. It requires a special coping and adjusting. Just how do we say "good-bye" to a life of sharing and loving? Although our loved one is physically gone, our feelings don't go with them. This is the nature of grief.

Mourning often begins at the time of diagnosis and continues long after the person has died.

It is often common for the surviving spouse, lover or friends to feel relief following the death of a loved one. This is likely to be true if dying has been drawn out and difficult.

You may not believe death has really happened. Some people experience disbelief and shock. It's not uncommon to want to deny that someone you've loved is gone.

The lack of grief following a death may be a warning sign that you may have a lot of difficulty later on. This may be a way to deny that someone we loved has died. While we all use denial and it is normal and often useful, we must remember that the pain is still there, even if we're not feeling it.

You may notice others acting inappropriately. Allow them to express their grief in their own way.

Grief is a process of healing that takes time. Learn to nurture yourself. Don't allow the pain to frighten you. The hurt can feel like a bottomless pit, but you do eventually feel better. To hurt from a loss is normal and okay.

You may feel life isn't worth living without the deceased. This is only a passing feeling, not an answer.

Intense weeping is one of the main expressions of grief. It is a release of feelings as well as a means of making contact with others during these painful moments. Crying can be healthy and cleansing. But not everyone is a crier, so don't try to force this if it is not a natural way for you to react.

While grieving, certain things may occur: shortness of breath, tightness in your throat, frequent sighing, sadness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, loss of sex drive, thinking that you're hearing the voice of the deceased.

During this time it's not uncommon for some people to yearn to be reunited with their loved one. You may search for her in a crowded room or on the street; you may expect him to be home waiting for you; or you may call his name at night. You may actually imagine seeing her in places she used to frequent. Don't be alarmed, it's par for the course.

The traditional rituals of mourning such as wakes, funerals, burials, shiva, memorial services, cemetery stones, novenas, etc. can serve an important function. The ceremonies help make accepting the reality of death easier and provide an arena to share your grief. Don't deprive yourself of these rituals if they are meaningful to you.

Mourning is a way of saying goodbye. Don't avoid it. You need time for healing. Pictures, letters, and other pieces of the deceased's personal property can be helpful during this time. Use them to help get you through this period.

After someone's death it's not uncommon to need a vacation, get away or lie on a beach. Getting some space and distance can be very helpful and healing.

Rest and take care of yourself, but beware of isolating yourself from friends, family and the living.

Throughout it all, remember that others can help. This is not a time to be alone. You're entitled to all the help you can get.

A friend, family member, social worker, or a clergy person may be useful people to reach out to.

If your loved one died from AIDS inquire if a local AIDS service organization or hospital offers special bereavement groups for anyone who has lost someone to AIDS. Mourning needs to be

Completed in order for you to go on with your life.

The period of mourning immediately following a death is not the time to make any major decisions. Wait. If it is the correct thing to do, time will tell.

You may be angry without realizing it. Try not to turn the anger or rage against yourself. Let it out. It's okay. A truly horrible thing has just happened to you. The loss of a spouse, lover, child, parent or close friend is a real reason to be angry.

You may be very angry at the deceased for dying. This is normal.

Forgiveness plays an important part in grief. You may need to forgive him or her for dying and leaving you. You may need to forgive yourself for all the things you could have done or would have done differently.

Grieving is a way of letting go of what might have been or should have been. It is a time for making peace with the reality of the loss and for saying "good-bye."

A loved one's death can trigger old memories of other losses: a parent, a sibling, a divorce, being fired. These memories may make this time even more painful.

Realize you may also be mourning the dreams you had for the deceased. As a spouse or lover, it may be the house you planned to buy together or that special trip you never got to take. As a parent, it may be the hopes and dreams you had for your child.

It is especially difficult for a parent to have a child die. It is not part of the natural order of things for a parent to bury a child.

Birthdays, anniversaries and holidays following the death of a loved one may be especially painful. Go easy and don't isolate yourself during these times.

That special song can reawaken old feelings. Just acknowledge to yourself that although painful this is another normal aspect of grief. These feelings remind us that we are still alive.

After the initial shock and disbelief a period of feeling overwhelmed, confused, or not being able to organize may happen. The hardest time of all may be long after everyone else is gone. Life returns to what it was before, only your loved one has died. Be aware that the loss is settling in. You may feel empty inside.

You can not continue to live your life as if the deceased were still alive. This does not mean that you have to give up your loved one. The task is to find ways to let that person live on in your memory.

Try not to worry about "Am I grieving correctly?" You'll do it in your own style and at your own pace. There is no correct way to grieve.

Grieving a death from AIDS can be complicated because no sooner have you buried one close friend or a lover then you learn that someone else has been diagnosed. It is especially painful and difficult. It can leave you numb, burnt out, and feeling unable to complete mourning any one individual.

Don't deny your urges to exercise your faith, religion or spirituality. It may provide some needed comfort and answers.

A point of understanding and acceptance eventually occurs. Thinking continuously about what has happened and about your dead loved one does diminish over time. The intense feelings lessen, and memories become less painful. A renewed interest in other people and in life in general does occur.

Try to take better care of yourself now more than ever.

And remember, it's okay to survive the death of someone you love.

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