

# You will know you are getting better when...

by the Schoedinger Griefcare Program



People that have experienced the loss of a loved one often wonder when they will be “done” grieving or feeling the emotional pain that grief may bring. There are no easy answers to these questions. Grief is different for everyone and everyone grieves in their own way and in their own time. It is important to understand that grief is not something a person “gets over”, but in time we learn to live with the change that has occurred in our life.

**Strive for reconciliation.** Reconciliation is what occurs as a bereaved person works to incorporate the new reality of life without the physical presence of the person who has died. With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence and the ability to become re-involved in the activities of daily life.

Helen Fitzgerald, certified thanatologist, lecturer and author of *The Mourning Handbook* reminds us that “*the progress through grief is so slow, and so often of a ‘one step forward and two steps backwards’ motion, that it is difficult to see signs of improvement.*” Fitzgerald suggests that the following are clues that will help you to see that you are working through your grief:

- You are in touch with the finality of the death. You now know in your heart that your loved one is truly gone and will never return to this earth.
- You can review both pleasant and unpleasant memories. In early grief, memories are painful because they remind you of how much you have lost. Now it feels good to remember, and you look for people to share memories with.
- You can enjoy time alone and feel comfortable. You no longer need to have someone with you all the time or look for activities to keep you distracted.
- You can drive somewhere by yourself without crying the whole time. Driving seems to be a place where many people cry, which can be dangerous for you and other drivers.
- You are less sensitive to some of the comments people make. You realize that painful comments made by family or friends are made in ignorance.
- You can reach out to help someone else in a similar situation. It is healing to be able to use your experience to help others.
- The music you shared with the one you lost is no longer painful to hear. Now, you may even find it comforting.
- You can sit through a church service without crying.
- Some time passes in which you have not thought of your loved one. When this first happens, you may panic, thinking, “I am forgetting.” This is not true. You will never forget. You are giving yourself permission to go on with your life and your loved one would want you to do this.

- You can enjoy a good joke and have a good laugh without feeling guilty.
- You have developed a routine or a new schedule in your daily life that does not include your loved one.
- You can concentrate on a book or favorite television program. You can even retain information you have just read or viewed.
- You no longer have to make daily or weekly trips to the cemetery. You now feel comfortable going once a month or only on holidays or other special occasions.
- You can find something to be thankful for. You always knew there were good things going on in your life, but they didn't matter much before.
- You have patience with yourself through "grief attacks." You know they are becoming further apart and less frightening and painful.
- Your eating, sleeping, and exercise patterns return to what they were beforehand.
- You no longer feel tired all the time.
- You can establish new and healthy relationships. New friends are now part of your life and you enjoy participating in activities with them.
- You feel confident again. You are in touch with your new identity and have a stronger sense of what you are going to do with the rest of your life.
- You can organize and plan your future.
- You can accept things as they are and not keep trying to return things to what they were.
- You look forward to getting up in the morning.
- You stop to smell the flowers along the way and enjoy experiences in life that are meant to be enjoyed.
- You look forward to holidays. Once dreaded occasions can now be anticipated with excitement, perhaps through returning to old traditions or creating new ones.
- The vacated roles that your loved one filled in your life are now being filled by yourself or others. When a loved one dies he or she leaves many "holes" in your life. Now those holes are being filled with other people and activities, although some will remain empty. You are more at ease with these changes.
- You can take the energy and time spent thinking about your loss and put those energies elsewhere, perhaps by helping others in similar situations or making concrete plans with your own life.
- You acknowledge your new life and even discover personal growth from experiencing grief.

Over time, you will realize you are grieving less and your loss does not dominate your life. Be encouraged by your progress through your grief journey.