Realistic Expectations of Grief

- Your healing will take longer than you think
- Your grief work will require more energy than you might have imagined.
- Your grief will change over time. Grief evolves and unfolds; it continually changes and develops.
- Your grief will impact all areas of your life: social, physical, emotional and spiritual.
- Your grief will not follow a “logical progression” of decreasing intensity. The grief process is more like a roller coaster, with dramatic ups and downs, than it is a logical, step-by-step progression.
- How you grieve will depend on how you perceive the loss.
- You will grieve not only for the person who has died but also for all the hopes and dreams you held for the future and all the needs your loved one can no longer fill.
- Your grief will involve a wide range of feelings such as sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, resentment, intolerance and irritability. There is no one, all-inclusive list of “appropriate grief feelings” but remember, feelings are not “good” or “bad”, “right” or “wrong”; they just are.
- Give yourself permission to feel and express whatever emotions you are experiencing.
- Your loss may trigger feelings of grief for earlier losses that you have not resolved or had not recognized at the time of the loss. Coming to terms with earlier, unresolved losses may be part of dealing with your current loss. Look at this as an opportunity to heal old wounds and to free yourself of burdens which you may have been carrying for a long time.
- Grief usually involves an “identity crisis”. You will need to figure out who you are now, without the person who has died.
- At times you may doubt your sanity and fear that you are going crazy.
• Grief is unpredictable. It comes in waves of intense pain which often occur without warning.
• You may have difficulty concentrating or focusing on the task at hand because you are preoccupied with the deceased or the death.
• Grief often involves re-evaluating your beliefs or philosophy of life. You may question your religion and doubt your faith. You may feel compelled to search for meaning to make sense of the tragedy and the pain you are experiencing.
• Grief may involve physical reactions including body aches, stomach problems, shortness of breath, lack of energy, etc.
• Grief can impair your capacity to think clearly, make decisions, or solve problems systematically. Consequently, even minor problems or annoyances, which you would normally take in stride, become huge and feel more burdensome than they would have prior to this loss.
• Your behavior in social situations may change.
• Certain dates, events and places may trigger sudden surges of grief.
• No two people will grieve in exactly the same way even if they are grieving for the same person.
• You will be disappointed from time to time by how others respond to your grief. Because our society has many unrealistic expectations (myths) about grief, you are bound to encounter people who respond inappropriately to you.
• Even after you have thoroughly worked through your grief, certain events and experiences may resurrect intense feelings of grief for you temporarily.
• You will always miss the person who has died. However, missing that person will not prevent you from moving forward and finding new meaning, peace and contentment.

Adapted from Realistic Expectations, by Mary Ann Harter Janson, RN, MS.