

Anticipated Grief

This resource has been adapted by Serena Stace, Counsellor and Art therapist, Family Support Team, Te Omanga Hospice (2020) from the Skylight (2007) resource *Anticipated Grief*.



Anticipated grief happens when someone we love is diagnosed with a life-limiting illness.

Anticipated grief often involves many of the same reactions as grief (shock, numbness, disbelief, anger, sadness, bargaining, acceptance). Often when people are given the news that their loved one 'is not going to get better' they feel helpless, waiting for their loved one to die but having no idea when this might happen. Some people report they feel as if they are going a 'bit crazy'. It can be really reassuring to understand that **anticipated grief** is a 'normal' process.

Anticipated grief can also involve grieving for what we could call secondary losses as well.

For example, it might be the loss of:

future shared plans

normal routines

our sense of security in life

Ways to help children and young people

Children and young people need to:

Be told in age appropriate language that their loved one has a 'life-limiting condition'

Be reassured it is not their fault (this is a very common thought of children and young people)

Have explained accurately to them what death means, in words they will understand

Be allowed to ask questions and have them answered honestly

Be allowed to grieve about the situation in their own way

Know and be reassured that they are loved, safe and cared for

Be included in things, as much as possible – not to be shut out

Be told honestly about what's happening as things occur, and what to expect (for example, **How** the patient's appearance might change and why different people appear, e.g. medical staff, social workers, minister)

Be allowed to go on living and enjoying their world in their own ways, (adults are often confused when playing quickly resumes as normal).

Ways to help Adults

Try not to ignore the situation or avoid it. Even if you're uncomfortable, let family members and whānau know you're there for them.

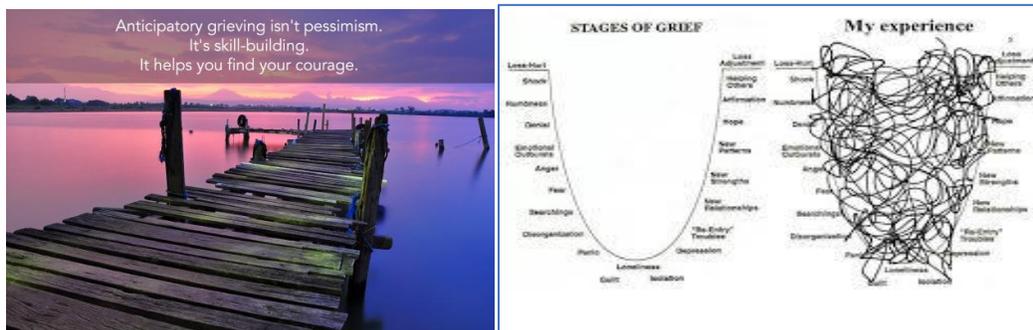
Acknowledge the situation briefly. Example: "I heard that....." This will show that you are open to talk about it with them, if they want to

Express your concern. Example: "I'm sorry to hear that this happened to you"

Be genuine in what you say and don't try to hide your feelings. Example: "I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care"

Offer your support. Example: "Please let me know what I can do for you"

regularly simply ask how they are, and don't assume you know how they will be thinking or feeling, on any given day. **Show** you are wanting to listen.



Remember:



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