



SHARE Atlanta Grief Support
www.shareatlanta.org
Allowing Grief to Happen to Heal
The First 24 Hours and Later

Grief is a process. Notes on.. The timeline of grief...

Marcia McGinnis

Moving forward means
learning, changing, coping,
but not forgetting.

Marcia McGinnis



The Grieving Process...

Grief is an active, normal process

that we must move t-h-r-o-u-g-h to survive our loss(es).

Moving from "what ought to be"

To realizing and identifying "what is"

Then discovering and defining a path for "what will be."

Linda Topf's You Are Not Your Illness Fireside, 1995

How long will I be in so much pain? When will healing happen? Does it really happen?

The normal grieving process lasts from six months to a year and, possibly, longer. The length depends upon many factors including the particular circumstances and you. This timeframe may sound like a long time, but we can't rush grief, and it varies from person to person. Society and most bereaved parents generally believe grief lasts about two weeks to a month. When parents find that they can't make their grief fit into this expected timeframe, they try to rush or deny their pain. There is often a sigh of relief when this expectation is lifted from their already burdened shoulders. *Healing actually can be helped when the pressure is relieved.*

The good news is that *our grief does not stay at the intense level as it is at first.* It varies as we move through the grieving process. Initially, (and this length of time varies for people) our grief overwhelms us, and we feel out of control (part of the grieving process). Then as we work through the process, we plateau and "adjust" to different levels of grief. We rest, redirect our energy, and become ready to move on in our effort to heal.

We gradually have more times of peace mixed with less times of sadness, etc. Eventually, we can visit our bittersweet memories on some occasions and feel relatively safe being there. Now, gratefully, we can come back to the present—whatever that is for us at that time - and *not stay* in the past memories.

Will the pain ever really be gone? Healing will Happen!

I believe that we know we are *healing when, for the most part, we can control our grief—it no longer controls us.* This ability becomes stronger until we rarely actually think about our loss and subsequent pain. We have not forgotten our child, *but we have healed.* Often, we realize that our child's presence is now safely a part of us. A part that we can now cope with.



Time and The Grieving Process

Many people say, "Give it time." They make it sound as though after some indefinite period of time things will be better. Usually these comments make us angry because they make us feel as though *eventually* we will "get over our loss." We know in our hearts that this pain is too deep to *just get over.*



A passage of time is empty if we don't take the responsibility to heal.

Initially, we need time to immerse ourselves in our pain to make our loss real to us and to honor our child that has died. This is part of healing. We gradually begin to feel safe with "what should be" and "what is." We know that we have done all we can to preserve that part of who we are: parents who have lost a special child. Though we never will like this fact, we become comfortable that our *baby will be a meaningful part of us forever.* We are *finally able* to move past holding on to "what is" so we can look to the future of "what will be."



The First Year... possible reactions...healing happens gradually...

- "...he performed an ultrasound. I'll never forget his words, "I'm afraid I have bad news." My world fell apart. I wanted to get out of there. I actually thought if I could go home then none of this would be true..
- ..I really couldn't let myself believe that there was something really wrong. I was so, so scare. I sat in the nursery chair and cried and cried. How could this be? I have never felt more empty and alone." Alicia, Canada

From the first moments that we learn something is wrong shock, panic, and denial set in and often stay with us, on some level, for several months. *These protect us* from the full impact of all that we have lost. Some bereaved seem to function very well during this period and convince everyone (even themselves) that they are fine. Other grieving parents will "shut-down" for a time. Both are *normal* reactions to loss.

From four to six months, we become **acutely aware** of all the losses that we are experiencing. Usually, we have moved out of shock, panic, and denial and the full feeling of sadness is present. The pain is unlike that which is suffered at first, but it usually is intense. We are no longer in shock and can better identify various losses and are *really ready and able to accept support and coping ideas*. Often parents seek group support at this time because family and friends are sure healing has already happened and don't know how to reach out to the couple.



Month 7 "...looking back on the two months after Ian's stillbirth when all I did was cry every day, ...I can see a difference now. I do recognize positive changes in me, and I applaud myself for them. We need to give ourselves credit sometimes..(I'm) still having some emotional days." JoAnn's Diary
www.shareatlanta.org/specialmenu.htm Making Your Child's Presence Meaningful

Most people function better after the seventh month, though the "firsts" are hard no matter when they occur: i.e. returning to work, holidays, due dates, etc.

"I thought..I was "getting over" (what a concept) the loss of our baby. But as the first anniversary nears, I find myself falling apart as if it were only yesterday. When does the pain lessen? When does it get better? *Am I crazy?*" Melinda/GA

Usually the **twelfth month**, **"the anniversary of our loss," is difficult** as reflections are made on the experience of the previous year. We talk about coping ideas in our group, online and in our booklet, "Coping Ideas."

Healing is aided when parents can put their baby's memory in a safe place by creating mementos and doing other activities that validate this child's life. No one will ever like what has happened but, hopefully, parents can make their special child's presence a meaningful part of their life.



Future Pregnancy ~ approaching it during the first year....

No one can tell you when the time is right, but making this choice becomes easier as the yo-yo experience of grief lessens. We gradually can take steps to regain a level of control in our lives and make plans for "what will be." While many are physically ready to conceive again fairly soon, being *emotionally* ready is very important. One of our concerns is the thought that having another baby will end your grief. *A subsequent baby should not be considered the primary means for healing*. Though, having a subsequent child is what most of our parents in SHARE Atlanta desire, work towards, and achieve. We discuss this during our meetings entitled "Future Pregnancy and Choices" and online under Subsequent Pregnancy Menu.

We want a living child, but the fear and confusion of grief weighs heavily on our hearts. This conflict does lessen as we work through our grief during the first year. The more we heal emotionally before our subsequent pregnancy, the less pain we bring into our relationship with our subsequent baby.

Healing ~ After the first year there is a marked difference (one that has been growing during that year) in our person because the intensity of emotions is lessened. We have experienced all the "firsts" and had time with the "what is." If we have been working on coping ideas, we once again feel peace and hope. We are more ready for, and usually have already begun working on, the "what will be."