

# *Family and Caregiver Education*

## BEREAVEMENT

### Understanding Anticipatory Grief

When someone you care about is seriously ill and may even die, it is natural to think about what your life would be like without that person. You may experience feelings of loss and grief, even though your loved one is still alive. This is called anticipatory grief. It is the normal process of trying to prepare yourself for the death of your loved one.

#### Some reactions you may have

- Sadness and tears
- Feelings of being alone and that nobody understands what you are experiencing
- Depression — feeling heavy, lethargic and like nothing seems to matter
- Procrastination
- Change in sleeping and eating patterns
- Loss of interest in other relationships
- Denial that it is really happening
- Anxiety — racing thoughts, feeling sick to your stomach, what feels like constant worry over things that can't be changed
- Sudden anger
- Fear of other loved ones becoming sick or dying
- Fear of unfinished business, such as:
  - Not having the opportunity to say “I love you” or “goodbye”
  - Not having the opportunity to make amends
- Thoughts of hopes and dreams that will not happen
- Guilt
- Avoidance of loved one who is ill
- Worry about what life will be like without your loved one
- Frustration about disruptions in your daily life:
  - Having to be a caregiver and all that goes along with that
  - Not being able to spend time around friends or other loved ones
  - Missing special events (or your loved one missing your special events)
  - Visits by nurses, hospice staff making everything more real
  - Seeing and hearing medical equipment in your home, such as an oxygen tank
- Seeing your loved one slowly (or not so slowly) fading away

Bereavement Services

(602) 530-6970

### **Some ways to help you get through this**

- Request Information about your loved one's illness
- Identify support systems, such as family, friends, church or synagogue and the community
- Identify someone you can confide in who is outside your family
- Decide how you want to communicate with your loved one — in person, by email, text or phone
- If hospice is involved, ask the hospice team members for support. They can:
  - Help find more assistance for the family
  - Lead a family meeting where everyone airs feelings
  - Listen to your concerns and talk frankly about your loved one's illness
  - Help you find information and support

### **Some Ways You Can Express Your Thoughts and Feelings**

- Express what you need to say through writing (journal, letter, poem, song), as well as music or art
- Create a special music playlist by downloading music that your loved one and you can enjoy together
- Put together a montage of photos or a memory book with your loved one
- Record conversations or stories with your loved one
- Create a family website for your loved one incorporating the music, photos and stories you are sharing with your loved one
- Take breaks as needed without feeling guilty — you are able to be more present when you are rested
- Ask for help when you need it

Talking to someone about what you are going through will not change your loved one being sick. However, it may give you what you need to get through this difficult time in your own way.