



Anticipatory Grief

A person with a life threatening disease, as well as their family, often begins grieving at the point of diagnosis. This anticipatory grief has struggles and issues that may be confusing to those experiencing this type of grieving. The following is a list of some of the dilemmas family members may face during the disease, treatment, or death process. There are no right or wrong choices.

- Holding on vs. letting go.
- Increasing attachment to the patient during the illness vs. starting to disconnect from the patient in terms of their existence in the future.
- Remaining involved vs. separating.
- Planning for life after the death of a patient vs. not wanting to betray the patient by considering life in their absence.
- Communicating feelings to the patient vs. not wanting to make the patient feel guilty for dying or bound to this world when he needs to go.
- Balancing support for the patient's increased dependency vs. supporting the patient's continued need for autonomy.
- Focusing on the past and recollecting vs. focusing on the future.
- Redistributing family roles and responsibilities vs. not wanting to do anything that would call attention to or cause more losses for the patient.
- Taking care of the patient's needs vs. taking care of one's own needs.
- Being immersed in participating in the patient's care vs. living one's own life.
- Experiencing the full intensity of the feelings involved in anticipatory grief vs. trying not to become overwhelmed.
- Focusing on the patient as a living person vs. remembering that the patient is dying.
- Continuing reinvestment in the patient who has multiple remissions and relapses and may die vs. not reinvesting as much any more.
- Treating the patient as one always has in the past vs. taking into account the patient's situation and treating her differently.

- Creating memorable experiences in the patient's last days and pushing for as much meaning as possible in the time remaining vs. allowing nature to take its course, reminiscing and just being present.
- Identifying a loss so it can be grieved by the patient vs. focusing more positively on the remaining potentials.