

help tip 4

Recognising the grief response and mental illness

When we think of grief we normally associate it with someone passing away.

When we have a loved one with a mental illness we also experience intense waves of grief as we mourn the losses in their lives and often the changes in our relationship with them.

Both the person with the mental illness, and those who love and care for that person, experience loss.

By loss we mean:

- Loss of hopes and dreams for the future
- Loss of relationship due to changes '*...my daughter used to be so loving and would tell me everything before she was ill...now she yells at me all the time.*'
- Changes in status and role '*...my husband used to make all the decisions and manage our money. Because he is ill I have to do it and he doesn't like it when I say he can't have whatever he wants.*'
- Loss of social supports '*...no-one asks me about my relative and I don't invite people to our home just in case something happens and we feel uncomfortable.*'
- Financial hardship '*he is always asking for money because he spends his pension straight away and says it's not enough ... then we don't have any money to live on.*'

Grief associated with the losses due to mental illness can feel ongoing without end, because it is difficult to mourn the losses in the presence of the person with the illness. There are few rituals in our society to help with grief due to mental illness.

Whilst the grief is more intense when our loved ones are unwell, it is often there even when they are well. This is normal because we love them and fear for their future. We think '*..what will happen after I'm gone, who will look after him or her.*'

What may help?

- Accept that it is OK to feel this way.
- Let yourself feel the pain and express it e.g. cry, yell, shout (not at people).
- Find someone to talk to about this pain. It may be a trusted friend to start with but if you feel overwhelmed by the pain ask for professional help.
- You may need to change your expectations and gradually accept the new situation.
- Accept the person if not their illness.

Remember living in the past with your dreams of what could have been may get in the way of enjoying what you DO have now!

