

Patient & Family Information Series



Anticipatory Grief

What is “Anticipatory Grief”?

Anticipatory grief is the grief that occurs before a loss. It consists of all of the feelings that are experienced related to a change in life. Anticipatory grief can occur in any situation where an upcoming change will lead to a loss, ie. retirement, moving to a new city, a child moving from home to college, or the loss of a loved one. In hospice care, it is a type of grief that is experienced by the patient as well as the family members who are caring for that patient.

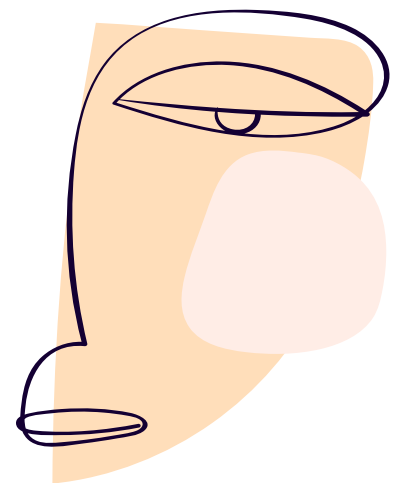
The anticipatory grief process starts when you become aware that the loss may occur. This can include the moment of the diagnosis of a terminal illness, admission to hospice care, recognition that we are losing physical abilities, the completion of funeral plans, or the starting of medications that are considered part of end of life care.

Often, we refer to anticipatory grief as an *anticipatory mourning* process. This process isn't just about what is right in front of you. In fact, anticipatory mourning includes the losses that have happened in the past, losses that are happening now, and losses that you anticipate are going to happen.

Looking at these losses can take a toll on our emotional state. It is normal to experience overwhelming feelings of grief during this time. Each person is unique, and how we look at loss is unique as well. The anticipatory mourning process may lead to the recognition of other losses (security, safety, how we view the world around us, or our connection to our support system). It is important to pay attention to your emotions and talk to a trusted friend or your **Ancora Medical Social Services** team who can help you talk through the concerns you may be having.

Signs that you may be struggling with Anticipatory Grief or Mourning

- ❖ emotional distress, ie. anger, anxiety, depression, shock/denial
- ❖ fatigue
- ❖ loneliness
- ❖ confusion
- ❖ fear
- ❖ difficulty concentrating/forgetfulness



Your ANCORA Social Services/Bereavement Team is available to support you in your grief process. Please reach out to them with any questions or concerns at 208-452-2672.

What are the BENEFITS of this Anticipatory Grief process?

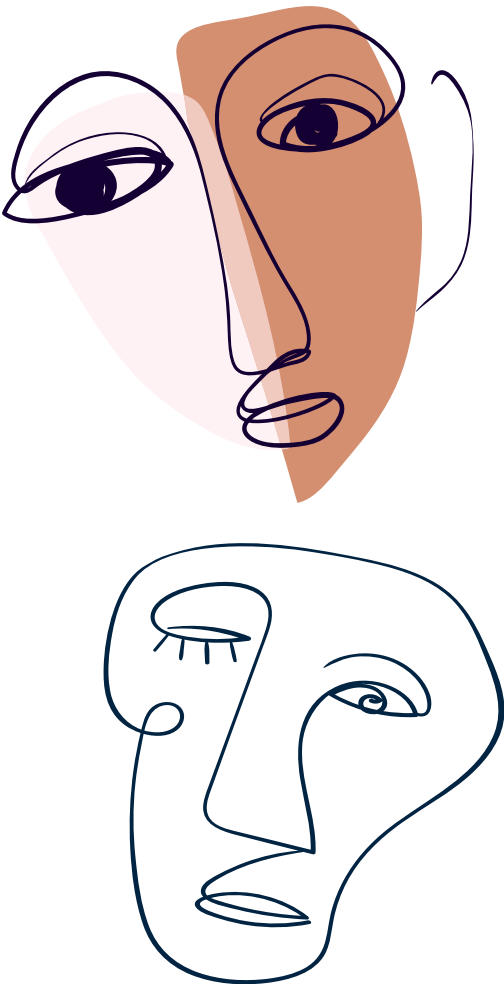
Though the anticipatory grief process can be challenging, it also presents the patient and family with some opportunities to have some very meaningful moments. For the person who is dying, this process allows them the opportunity to finish projects that need to be completed, make memories with their loved ones, and have important and necessary conversations.

For those who are caring for the dying person, anticipatory grief can help them in using this time to be present, have needed conversations, and say goodbye. Additionally, this process allows families to start preparing for the ways their life will change after their loved one has died.

In hospice care, we consider these moments a **gift**. In his book The Four Things That Matter Most, author Ira Byock writes that there are certain phrases that are important to hear, and say, to those you love.

“ I love you
Please forgive me
I forgive you
Thank you ”

If we can be aware of how we are feeling, and recognize the anticipatory grief process in ourselves, we can give this gift to those we love and care about.



How does someone cope with Anticipatory Grief?

- ❖ Anticipating a loss of a family member is exhausting mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. We hope the following tips can help you cope.
- ❖ Allow for the feelings of grief to be present. This is one of the tasks of grief and can help you as you move through the mourning process.
- ❖ Educate yourself as to what is happening. “Knowledge is power” is a mighty saying during this time.
- ❖ Talk to your loved one, share memories, have conversations, do activities together. Taking this time now can help you in the bereavement process.
- ❖ Talk to someone. If you can share your feelings and thoughts with a trusted friend, it might just be the thing that helps you get through this process. If you need professional help, know that this is normal. Many people ask for help during difficult times, and often find benefit in talking to someone who is not connected to the situation.

Your Medical Social Services team at Ancora Health Services can help you discuss and cope with the process of anticipatory grief and mourning. Share with us how you are feeling so we can know how to support you.