



## ***Grief...It's not just about death***

**~Shock/Denial ~ Anger ~ Bargaining ~ Depression ~Acceptance ~**

Most people associate grief with the death of a loved one. Did you know that grief may visit us during many different stages of life? Grief is defined as “keen mental suffering or distress over ...loss; a sharp sorrow or painful regret.” For parents or guardians of children with special needs, grief may visit more often than for others.

Parents of children with special needs of all ages may have perpetual visitations of grief (but not perpetual grief). There is grief over the dreams you had of being a parent, milestones missed or delayed by your precious child, or the reality that you are not following the road you imagined, as you anticipated parenting. So how could grief be *good*, when it seems to focus on loss and despair? As Emily Perl Kingsley points out in “Welcome to Holland,” life does not always bring us to where we had planned. Sure, we get upset, angry, may try bargaining with a higher power, and sometimes get depressed. Once we accept that life *is what it is* and *we are where we are*, things start to look better. We start to see that our children show us new ways of learning and living life. With the affirmation that you **TRULY** are not alone, you experience recovery and healing.

As the parent of a child with special needs, you have the right to grieve and may go through each of the five stages: Shock/Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. This can happen time and time again. You have the right to cry over your losses (even if it started with a melted crayon in the dryer!). When you come to the crossroad of ‘acceptance’ and are ready to move forward, your inner strengths will shine as you see the special gifts your child has. And that is something to share and celebrate, and prompt you to support others who are just starting out on their journey.

Sometimes just recognizing that you are in the Grief process will inspire you to move forward. Grief is individual and personal. It is not ‘one size fits all.’ Grief is **NOT** something that can be rushed. Regardless of whether your grief is over a life, a loss, or a realization that you “woke up in Holland,” it is healthy and necessary to go through the process. Each stage has a purpose, and you are not guaranteed to go from one to the next without sometimes returning.

If you or someone you know seem to be dwelling in any one stage of grief or may be suffering from depression, reach out for help. You are **NOT** alone! Speak with your doctor, clergy, a friend, or reach out to Family TIES to find out about resources available in your area.



**For more Information, contact your Family TIES Regional Coordinator at  
1-800-905-8437 ~ [www.massfamilyties.org](http://www.massfamilyties.org)**

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