



The Grieving Wheel
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The Grieving Wheel - A Model of the Grieving Process

Hospice Yukon has developed a model of the grieving process we call the Grieving Wheel, which is based on the circular design of the First Nations' Medicine Wheel. Each grieving experience is completely unique and yet there are ways we all grieve the same. The **Grieving Wheel** helps us reflect upon these normal responses to loss as recurring cycles in our lives. Beginning at the top with **LIFE AS USUAL**, we move around the wheel, often swinging back and forth between the four phases. Life as usual is a time when the daily routines are familiar, with the usual ups and downs. Then **loss occurs** and a new journey begins.

At first, we find ourselves in a state of SHOCK, sometimes unable to believe or comprehend what has happened. We hold everything at arms length for a while, denying that it could be true. We feel numb and disoriented. We long for a return to Life as Usual, but in spite of our resistance to what has happened, we eventually come to **acknowledge** our loss. Shock can last a very short time or can become prolonged if in our resistance to painful emotions we stay in the state of numbness.

As we let go of our resistance, we experience some or all of the intense and painful emotions that we associate with grief: sadness, fear, anger, guilt, despair, loneliness, depression and hopelessness. When the emotions are overwhelming it feels like **CHAOS**. Our old, familiar world has collapsed.

This is a difficult but very important part of our journey around the wheel. Understanding the grieving process can help us here. Knowing that this intense suffering will end and will lead us towards our healing, we can find the courage to stay present and open to all the feelings that arise.

Through the experience of the pain and suffering we begin to see the world differently. Everything has changed since the loss. We are not the same person we used to be. Our perspective has changed, and we find ourselves searching for the meaning in it all. As we begin adjusting to life without our loved one, we come to a new way of thinking about life; a **new understanding**.

The Grieving Wheel (cont'd)

The focus of our journey now turns to NEW BEGINNINGS. Slowly, we are finding more and more energy available to us. Energy that was previously going into coping with the Chaos of our feelings. With this energy we begin the job of putting our life back together. We practice being “the new me” and start the process of re-entering society, of finding our place in the world again.

The process of **integration** can be gradual as we slowly come back into a state of balance within ourselves. Slowly, there is a growing sense of comfort and familiarity with our new circumstances and who we are.

We have now come full circle and we are back in Life as Usual. Although when we look around we realize that this is a very different place from where we began our journey. We have undergone a personal transformation and this is now our new “normal.” Our journey around the wheel has not just been circular; it has actually been a spiral of growth bringing us to a new place in our life.

