

# Hospice and Palliative Services

## First-AID for difficult emotions



*In times of great loss, you may be confronted with unfamiliar or very intense emotions. A natural response is to keep a lid on them, but sooner or later, suppressing emotions takes a physical and emotional toll. Try this First-AID plan for handling difficult emotions, if they arise, and hopefully their intensity will lessen and healing can begin.*

### **A**ccept whatever you are feeling.

There is nothing wrong with any feeling you have, whether it is relief, envy, guilt, anger or rage. Not accepting your feelings, however, creates tension and an inner tug of war. Pay attention to physical cues. They are often the first sign of suppressed feelings – a lump in the throat, a knot in the stomach, a tensed jaw.

### **I**dentify your feelings.

Try to be specific about what you feel. “I feel bad” is fairly vague, whereas “I feel discouraged about the slow progress I’m making” is more helpful. When you name your feelings, you’re less likely to be overwhelmed by them. However, coming up with a descriptive name is not always easy. A list of some common feelings after loss can help you get started: angry, sad, despairing, lonely, anxious, fearful, worried, guilty, envious, resentful, weak, unworthy, overwhelmed, unmotivated, unorganized, distracted, discouraged and incompetent. You could also be feeling determined, courageous, calm, cared-for, relieved, thankful, happy and trusting.

### **D**o something with your feelings.

- Cry – let the dam break.
- Talk to someone who can listen without judging.
- Depict your feelings with crayons, markers or paint.
- Rip up an old magazine or phone book.
- Hit a pillow or punching bag.
- Walk, run or engage in some other physical activity.
- Find a secluded place to yell.
- Write about your feelings, even if it’s anger towards God or the one who died. This isn’t dishonoring of them, and it helps you gain release.