

DENIAL

Denial is a normal reaction when you are told something too horrible to face. Certainly you reacted with denial when you learned of your loved one's death. Denial is not only a universal reaction to a horror, but it is a way of not facing that horror all at once. Fortunately denial protects you from a sudden crushing blow, and because of denial you can allow the truth to filter into your awareness more slowly. Denial is normal, healthy and protective.

But denial that lasts too long is not healthy. You must face the reality that your love is dead BEFORE you can begin to grieve. Reality is not always good or even acceptable. Many times it is terribly, terribly painful. Your love's death is a painful reality, but you must face it if you are to grieve successfully.

Our society uses euphemisms for anything unpleasant. We say "up-chuck" instead of "vomit". We say "I'm going to the bathroom" instead of "to the toilet". We say "terminated" instead of "fired". Even nurses and doctors say "the patient has expired" instead of "died". Dr. Earl Grollman, author of "Living When a Loved One Has Died", says that the new "four letter" word is DEAD. The euphemisms for "dead" are many. We say "passes away", "left us", "went to his reward", "asleep in Jesus", and on and on. Our society uses these phrases to soften real truth, but as bereaved people we can't do this. I heard one person say "I can't use the word 'dead.' It sounds so final". Well, death is final and no matter how you flower it up, your loved one is still dead.

Keeping a love's room exactly as it was for an overlong time, or refusing to put away his belongings is another form of denial. In the early months you have neither the energy nor the wish to do something with a room or belongings, and don't let yourself be rushed into doing this, but to keep everything the same way for years is believing, unconsciously, that your loved one is "coming back".

It is important to know, at this deep level, that your love is dead. It takes time, sometimes a number of months, before you are able to face that fact, but eventually you must. The use of

euphemisms, or pretending, or doing nothing with his or her possessions, keeps you from getting "into" your grief. It is hard to face the reality that your love is dead, but to continue to feed your unconscious belief that she is still alive, is to put off your healing.