Understanding Grief

Grief is the response to loss, particularly to the loss of someone or something that has died, to which a bond or affection was formed. Grieving the loss of life is what most people think of when we talk about grief. In fact, the definition of grief is deep sorrow, especially that caused by someone's death. However, it is also important to be aware of anticipatory grief and disenfranchised grief.

Grief can occur with any loss, and grieving is a necessary step in the healing process.

Anticipatory grief is grief that occurs when a loved one is severely ill or in the process of dying. This type of grief is common when you see a change or deterioration of a loved one, and we begin to mourn that loss. Anticipatory grief can have the same symptoms of those experienced after a death has occurred. It is important to note that anticipatory grief does not replace or make the grief process after a death easier. Anticipatory grief ends when the loved one dies, and you continue to mourn their loss. Some important steps in processing the death of a loved one include:

- **Accept the reality of the loss.** It is normal to experience a variety of emotions and turmoil, accepting the reality of the loss will allow you to move forward in the grieving process.
- **Work through the emotional pain.** A counselor can be helpful in sorting through the complexity of your feelings.
- **Adjust to the environment without the loved one.** Develop a plan to manage emotions and thoughts.
- **Relocate the deceased in a way that is comfortable for you and in which you can honor and remember them.** This step will vary depending on your style of grieving, strengths, beliefs, and expectations. Relocating the deceased may be placing an urn or memorial picture in a special place in your house, regularly visiting their burial site, belief that he or she is in Heaven or your guardian angel, or has been reincarnated, etc.

What about the feelings of loss associated with living with PWS? Is this a grief individuals feel when they are faced with a loss of freedom or independence? Is it grief that individuals experience when they can't reach their personal goals, when they can't have a family of their own, or when they can't own and drive a car? Yes. These are all examples of disenfranchised grief.

Disenfranchised grief is grief experienced when a loss occurs that is not openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported. Any loss experience that is not commonly experienced by others can lead to disenfranchised grief.

If you need additional support or someone to talk to, PWSA | USA is always here. Call us at (941) 312-0400 or email info@pwsausa.org.