

Grief & Loss

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What is a Loss?

Loss of anything that plays a significant role in your life can result in grieving

Grieving is a natural process that needs to be worked through and which takes time. As we learn to cope, we sometimes have unexpected reactions and feelings which can be misunderstood by ourselves and others.

At first we may feel numb, this protects us from the full impact of the loss. As time passes disbelief gives way to a multitude of feelings. More often than not, we are unprepared but the better we understand the personal reactions to loss, the better we can deal with the changes and eventually come to terms with it.

Grief is a normal and necessary response to a loss. Therefore it is okay to grieve. Grief is a process and it takes time, there is no right or wrong way to grieve. No two people grieve the same.

Some Causes of Grief and Loss:

- Death
- Divorce/Separation
- Injury/Chronic Illness
- Moving to new country
- Retirement

Signs of Grief

As we learn to cope with and adjust to our loss we may undergo many changes in thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Some of the signs of grief may be physical or behavioral while others are emotional. Some of your thoughts may even seem bizarre and may be disturbing to you but these occurrences are described as normal reactions by bereaved people.

The Following May Be Some Symptoms of Grief:

Behavioral

- Crying
- Sleep disturbance
- Sighing
- Restlessness/over activity
- Appetite disturbances
- Absent-mindedness
- Social withdrawal

After a Death

- Dreams of the deceased
- Avoiding reminders of the deceased
- Searching and calling out for the deceased

Mental (Thoughts)

- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Preoccupation
- Decrease in motivation and concentration
- Hallucinations

After a Death

- Sense of deceased presence

Physical

- Headaches
- Hollowness in stomach
- Tightness in chest or throat
- Oversensitivity to noise
- Sense of depersonalisation (feeling unreal)
- Breathlessness
- Muscle weakness
- Lack of energy

Emotional (Feelings)

- Shock
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt
- Inadequacy
- Hurt
- Relief
- Loneliness

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Stages of Grief

It can be difficult at times to resume our activities and while it is important to find time to grieve, (think of the loss, feel sad, angry etc) it is important to get on with everyday activities as soon as you are able to.

Even though we all respond to grief differently, experience shows that we often tend to pass through stages and at times we seem to be coping better than other time.

Some of These Common Experiences are:

SHOCK

Numbness and disbelief are the usual responses to a significant loss. When we are in shock we may feel vulnerable.

DENIAL

We may find it difficult to accept the reality of the loss and carry on as if nothing is happening.

ANGER AND OTHER INTENSE EMOTIONS

After the initial numbness wears off, we may experience various overwhelming emotions including grief, rage, regret, blame etc.

BARGAINING

Difficulties in coming to terms with the finality, of the loss, often expressed as the 'if only' time.

DEPRESSION

A steady, sad hopelessness may last for a while.

ACCEPTANCE / RESOLUTION

Eventually we accept the finality of the loss and are able to move on.

It has been found that sharing your grief can be helpful.

Coping with Grief – Doing the Work

To get through grief one must work at it. Grief work should not be put off. The longer we wait to get started the harder and more unpleasant it may get.

You need to seek support to talk about your feelings and experiences, as keeping to yourself may prevent you from seeing your situation more clearly. Try to find someone who has had a similar experience and share it with them.

Eventually you will come to accept the reality of the loss and adjust to your new environment.

Here are a few ideas that will help in the process.

- Be patient with yourself
- Seek assistance and support
- Choose a time of day when you allow yourself to think of the loss
- Find a friend who will listen or a counsellor
- Write down your feelings and thoughts
- Try to maintain regular daily habits, eg. eating, bathing etc