

Grief

Grief occurs in response to the loss of someone or something. The loss may involve a loved one, a job, or possibly a role (student entering the workplace or employee entering retirement). Anyone can experience grief and loss. It can be sudden or expected; however, individuals are unique in how they experience this event. Grief, itself, is a normal and natural response to loss. There are a variety of ways that individuals respond to loss. Some are healthy coping mechanisms and some may hinder the grieving process. It is important to realize that acknowledging the grief promotes the healing process. Time and support facilitate the grieving process, allowing an opportunity to appropriately mourn this loss.

Why are we afraid of dying?

- The premature interruption of life activities.
- Effects of death upon family members, classmates and friends.
- The fear of death without dignity, for example, being kept alive by machine.
- The fear of nothingness after death.

Common Reactions to Loss

Individuals experiencing grief from a loss may choose a variety of ways of expressing it. No two people will respond to the same loss in the same way. It is important to note that phases of grief exist; however, they do not depict a specific way to respond to loss. Rather, stages of grief reflect a variety of reactions that may surface as an individual makes sense of how this loss affects them. Experiencing and accepting all feelings remains an important part of the healing process.

Denial, numbness, shock

- This serves to protect the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss.
- Numbness is a normal reaction to an immediate loss and should not be confused with "lack of caring".
- Denial and disbelief will diminish as the individual slowly acknowledges the impact of this loss and accompanying feelings.

Anger

- This reaction usually occurs when an individual feels helpless and powerless.
- Anger may result from feeling abandoned, occurring in cases of loss through death.
- Feelings of resentment may occur toward one's higher power or toward life in general for the injustice of this loss.
- After an individual acknowledges anger, guilt may surface due to expressing these negative feelings.
- Again, these feelings are natural and should be honored to resolve the grief.

Bargaining

- At times, individuals may ruminate about what could have been done to prevent the loss.
- Individuals can become preoccupied about ways that things could have been better, imagining all the things that will never be.
- This reaction can provide insight into the impact of the loss; however, if not properly resolved, intense feelings of remorse or guilt may hinder the healing process

Depression

- After recognizing the true extent of the loss, some individuals may experience depressive symptoms.
- Sleep and appetite disturbance, lack of energy and concentration, and crying spells are some typical symptoms.
- Feelings of loneliness, emptiness, isolation, and self-pity can also surface during this phase, contributing to this reactive depression.
- For many, this phase must be experienced in order to begin reorganizing one's life.

Acceptance

- Time allows the individual an opportunity to resolve the range of feelings that surface.
- The grieving process supports the individual. That is, healing occurs when the loss becomes integrated into the individual's set of life experiences.
- Individuals may return to some of the earlier feelings throughout one's lifetime.
- There is no time limit to the grieving process. Each individual should define one's own healing process

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Guidelines That May Help Resolve Grief

Seldom does a person go into one side of grief and come out the other side the same as before the loss. Think of going through your grief, rather than getting over the loss. By seeing the process through, you can develop personal strengths to cope with other types of loss and difficulties that may come up later in life. Acceptance of the loss means gaining a perspective - a new sense of self and what you can do with your life. You may find the following helpful:

- Give yourself some quiet time alone to think about moving toward a new equilibrium - a transition from who you were before the loss to who you will be after the grieving process.
- Be as open as you can be in expressing your feelings; cry if you need to. Express any anger or sense of unfairness if you feel it.
- Play out in your mind the unfinished business in the relationship and try to come to a resolution; say good-bye.
- Tell someone you trust the story of your loss.
- Try to focus on what you were able to do for the deceased, instead of what you "should have done" or could have done.
- Use a journal to document the healing process.
- Bereavement groups provide an opportunity to share grief with others who have experienced similar loss.
- If the healing process becomes too overwhelming, seek professional help.

Seeking Professional Help If You Need It

If you find it too difficult to move through the grief on your own or with the help of family and friends, you may want to consult a professional who can help you resolve some issues of grief in a confidential atmosphere.

Being Helpful To Others

Social support for the bereaved is most important. Others can provide a patient presence to allow the bereaved an opportunity to tell the story of the loss and to share how he or she is feeling. Remember that it is up to the individual to get through the grieving process; others can only provide support. If you are concerned for someone who appears to be having a difficult time managing alone, you may want to suggest seeking professional assistance.

Recommended Reading

Death, The Final Stage of Growth. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975 Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth

On Death and Dying. New York: MacMillan, 1969 Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth

When Bad Things Happen to Good People. New York: Schocken Books, 1981 Kushner, H.S.

Parents, friends, and family can often be helpful. If you feel comfortable and trusting of someone close, there is a good chance it would help to talk with them. Members of the clergy may also be helpful. Mental health and counseling agencies such as the Counseling Center, as well as private professional therapists and counselors, are important resources.

If you would like more assistance or counseling, please contact the Counseling Center at 424-2061. Learn more about [counseling](#) or about [how to make an appointment](#).

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