

An introduction to dealing with

Grief



What is Grief?

Grief over the death of a loved one is perhaps the most intense experience of loss we will have in our lifetime. It permeates the fabric of our lives, affecting our emotions, our bodies and our relationships with others.

Grief is a natural response to any loss. Grieving, letting go, is part of life. We have losses all the time (a relationship that does not work out, a job change, letting go of our youth, a friend does not call). Big and small losses.....and death is the most difficult loss to face.

We each grieve our own way. Some ways can be more helpful than others. The process takes time, sometimes a long time. But peace comes. It is important to grieve as unresolved grief can cause serious physical and psychological problems for us. We can avoid the grief process by – sleep, getting busy, turning to religion with a “vengeance”, drinking and drug use, taking dangerous risks, or getting into another relationship too soon.

Remember no one can tell you how to grieve or how long it will last. As we said earlier, everyone’s process is unique. However, there are some elements of bereavement that are more or less common to all who pass through it. Whether you are grieving, or you are a friend of someone who has recently lost someone, understanding some of the common elements of the grieving process can help.

In helping others grieve, there’s no right way, but the important thing is to be there, be present, have space in yourself to let the other person’s pain in. Encourage the person to feel what they feel. Usually, they need to tell the story. Often they are angry and need to express that. As people move through the stages of grief, they need to talk about their feelings. In some sense we talk our grief away. We cannot take the pain away for another, but we can be there to listen. Avoid platitudes.



Stages of Grief

Grieving is the slow work of redefining our world without the presence of someone we love. It takes time and patience to heal after such a loss. Grieving is the process of returning again and again to our images, feelings and memories of our loved one until our loss is bearable. Feelings will come and go and the stages of grief are not always in progression. Whatever our feelings are, they are not a sign of weakness or that a person is wallowing in self-pity.

Shock

A kind of numbness, often with physical sensations like a knot in the stomach, loss of appetite. It's a time of vague unreality. Denial at this stage protects one from the pain. "This can't be true, this isn't real". Even if we've had a long time to prepare for the death, still there is shock.



Guilt

The "if only's" that we go through:
Real Guilt: We failed and need to forgive ourselves and go on.
Neurotic guilt: Feelings of guilt out of proportion to our responsibility, or putting guilt on ourselves when it is not due. Why am I surviving? It's wrong for me to be happy can arise for us. Talking to someone can help.



Anger

Anger may come in various degrees from mild to raging depending on one's personality and the circumstances. Anger needs to be expressed (exercise, scream into a pillow, talk it out, cry). Unexpressed anger can cause depression and physical problems.



Depression

Hopelessness, fear of our own health, being overwhelmed. We miss our loved one/friend and there is great sadness and loneliness. We need people to help us through this time. Sometimes it is hard for us to share our feelings, especially depression, but again it is natural. Our culture expects people to "get over it" quickly but grieving takes time. We need to go through the feelings and not run away. Review mementos, play nostalgic music, look at the pictures. It's okay to cry and it can be cleansing and healing.

Peace and Acceptance

No two people are the same in the grief process, but peace comes. The goal is to be able to remember our loved one without deep pain, but with joy, and to integrate the loss into our lives so that our capacity to love becomes greater. Remembering our loved one motivates us for quality living.



10 tips while grieving

1. Accept the grief and your feelings. Do not try to be “brave” ...take time to cry and be quiet by yourself for thoughts and feelings to emerge.
2. Talk about your feelings to someone who listens without judgement. Talk often. You do not just “snap out of it”. Give yourself time.
3. Try to resume usual activities. Be occupied but not frantic.
4. Take care of yourself (rest, diet, exercise) and do something nice for yourself each day. Be patient about the confusion and your forgetfulness.
5. Deal with any guilt that may emerge and get help if necessary to do this.
6. Grow in your own understanding of the meaning of death, and therefore the meaning of life. Participation in a memorial service can be healing.
7. Associate with old friends, and talk about your loss if possible.
8. Postpone major decisions.
9. Turn your grief into creative energy by helping others. Sometimes writing helps also. A ritual in memory of the loved one might help.
10. Get professional help if needed, but again know that grieving is natural and it takes time. Reading might be helpful and also a support group to share experience and feelings with others in a similar place.

Remember

No matter how deep your sorrow, you are not alone. Others have been there and will help share your load if you will let them. Try not to deny them the chance to care for and support you towards healing. The best memorial to a loved one is a full, rich and growing life.



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