Grief at Work



Five Stages of Grief

by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

Five stages of Grief

- 1. Denial
- 2. Anger
- 3. Bargaining
- 4. Depression
- 5. Acceptance/Rebuilding

Grief is finished when it is finished. There is very little that is reasonable about it. If you are still feeling grief 2 or 3 years after a major loss, it means you are not finished yet with your grief, not that you are a weak or bad person. Change from "Why" to "How" questions can indicate growth and recovery through the grief process.

Distorted Grief

- 1. Persistent thoughts of self destruction.
- 2. Prolonged failure to provide for your basic recovery needs.
- 3. Persistence of one particular reaction to grief.
- 4. Emergence of substance abuse.

Key facts about grief

- 1. The way out of grief is through it.
- The worst kind of grief is yours.
- 3. Grief is hard work.
- 4. Effective grief is not done alone.

Mistaken beliefs about grief and loss

- You never recover from a major loss such as death.
- Time is the only healer to grief.
- Nobody else can help you with your grief.
- The death of a spouse is more painful than divorce.
- A slow death is easier to handle than a sudden death
- If you keep busy, your grief will go away.

Responding to losses: Choose to grieve and recover

- Identify what you have lost...precisely.
- Do a personal assessment of yourself.
- Talk about your loss and your grief.
- Find a support community.

Normal Reactions to Loss

The Grief Process

Grief is often misunderstood by people who have never faced the loss of a close loved one. If this has happened to you for the first time, the following thoughts and information may help you realize that what you are experiencing is normal, though painful. These painful feelings will lessen as long as you are willing to do the grief work which is ahead of you.

Other people may feel uncomfortable as they observe your pain, so it takes courage not to run from your pain, just to make others feel "okay". Finding others who do understand the pain of grief is important at this time. Joining a grief support group is one way.

Also, there is the other side: needing to take a "vacation" from your grief allows your body some relief from the pain. Some people do it by going back to work, others by getting involved in a project or activity. You may only be able to do this for twenty minutes at a time during the first few weeks of your grieving, but even that amount of relief can help. The heaviness of grief will lessen, although there may continue to be difficult days for no reason at all. The length of time differs for every individual.

The following information may be helpful during this time:

Possible Normal Physical Symptoms of Grieving:

- Dry mouth, throat and skin (Possibly caused by dehydration from crying. Drink plenty of water and use lots of lotion.
- Loss of appetite or over-eating.
- Sleeplessness.
- Frequently thinking about the one who died.
- A need for sighing (difficulty getting enough air in your lungs).
- An empty, hollow feeling in your stomach.
- The area in your heart can hurt, as if it were broken.
- Extreme fatigue.
- Difficulty maintaining concentration, forgetfulness.
- Sensitivity to loud noises.
- Feeling confused.

Possible Normal Emotional Symptoms to Grief:

- Things seem unreal.
- You may feel distant from others. It may seem as if no one really cares or understands.
- Loss of meaning in life (the meaning will return though your life and how you see it maybe different).
- Crying. This is healthy and important in healing. (Keeping from crying might cause health problems later. Nature can gave us tears to flow, not dam up. Men especially can have difficulty in this area, because they have been taught not to cry. But they do, and it's normal and healthy).

Restoring Life Balance

Here are many way to restore lifestyle balance. Keeping track of and making progress with as many of the following changes is a good way to regain life balance.

Physical Self-Care

- Eat regularly
- Eat healthy
- Exercise
- Get regular medical care for prevention
- Get regular medical care when needed
- Take time off when sick
- Get massages
- Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other physical activity that is fun.
- Get enough sleep
- Wear clothes you like
- Take vacations
- Take day trips or mini-vacations
- Make time away from telephones

Psychological Self-Care

- Make time for self-reflection
- Have your own personal psychotherapy
- Write in a journal.
- Read literature that is unrelated to work
- Do something at which you are not expert or in charge
- Decrease stress in your life
- Notice your inner experiences-listen to your thoughts, judgements, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings.
- Let others know different aspects of you.
- Engage your intelligence in a new area, e.g., go to an art museum, history exhibit, sports event, auction, or theatre performance.
- Practice receiving from others.
- Be curious.
- Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes.

Emotional & Spiritual Self-Care

Emotional Self-Care

- Spend time with the others whose company you enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in your life
- · Give yourself affirmations, praise yourself
- Find ways to increase your sense of self-esteem
- Reread favorite books, re-view favorite movies
- Identify comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places, and seek them out
- Allow yourself to cry
- Find things to make you laugh
- Express your outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches and protests
- Play with children

Spiritual Self-Care

- Make time for reflection
- Spend time with nature
- Find a spiritual connection or community
- Be open to inspiration
- Cherish your optimism and hope
- Be aware of nonmaterial aspects of life
- Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- Be open to not knowing
- Identify what is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life
- Meditate
- Pray
- Sing
- Spend time with children
- Have experiences of awe
- · Contribute to causes in which you belief
- Read inspirational literature (talks, music, etc.)

Grieving

Feelings Sometimes Associated with Grieving

- Shock and numbness (a normal way to react to a loss).
- Guilt ("if only's " are a natural need to be expressed).
- Anger (often were taught not to feel angry, but anger is a normal feeling and needs to be accepted and expressed in a non-destructive manner).
- Depression (at times, loneliness and lack of motivation may occur, but at some point your motivation will return).
- Relief (this is a normal feeling, especially when the one who died suffered before death or in a sudden death where there was no suffering).

Suggestions

- Avoid use of drugs and alcohol. They usually stop or delay grief (which means you'll simply have to face the pain of the loss later on).
- Avoid hasty decisions (IE. Moving, financial investments, etc.)
- Even though your patience may wear thin, try letting others know what you need and how to help you (giving them this handout may help them to understand you and your needs a little better. Gather strength, whenever possible, from your support system, whether it be family, relatives and/or friends).

Resolution, Readjustment and Reinvestment

Have hope, for even before the grief work is over you will have glimpses of living again without constant pain. But it does not happen overnight, so try not to push yourself. Research shows that most people think grieving should be ended by either the day after the funeral or at least a two month time period. THAT IS NOT TRUE! Depending upon your relationship to the deceased (how emotionally close your were), hard grief may last for several months or more.

There will come a time when you will have built a new life for yourself. You will be different, and a "healed scar" will be where the pain once was. You may, occasionally, still feel sad and have a strong need to cry. Go ahead, give in to it, there will be those times