

Day 6: Dealing with Grief

In one way or another, we are all affected by death. Losses are inevitable and are ever present in all lives. Death is universal. Grief is universal. We all must cope with bereavement at some stage in our lives. The finality of death brings to those left behind a tremendous amount of emotional pain. Grief is not something abnormal; rather, it is a normal and inevitable step in our journey through life. Two simple definitions of grief are 1) the conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a familiar pattern or behavior. 2) a normal, natural and painful emotional reaction to loss. We can grieve not only for the passing of a human life, but also for the death of a relationship (divorce). Grieving is difficult because it involves many intense feelings - love, sadness, fear, anger, relief, compassion, hate, or happiness to name a few. Not everyone experiences all of these feelings but many in the grieving process experience several of them at the same time. The feelings are intense, disorganizing, and can be long lasting. Grieving often has been described as drowning in a sea of painful emotions.

There are certain stages of grief.

1) Shock - Immediately following the death of a loved one it is difficult to accept the loss. A feeling of unreality occurs. During those first days and through any religious rituals or memorials there is a feeling of being-out-of-touch.

2) Emotional Release - the awareness of just how dreadful the loss is accompanied by intense pangs of grief. In this stage a grieving individuals sleep poorly and weep uncontrollably

3) Panic - For some time a grieving person can feel in the grip of mental instability. They can find themselves wandering around aimlessly, forgetting things, and not being able to finish what they started. Physical symptoms also can appear -- tightness in the throat, heaviness in the chest, an empty feeling in the stomach, tiredness and fatigue, headaches, migraine headaches, gastric and bowel upsets.



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4) Guilt - At this stage an individual can begin to feel guilty about failures to do enough for the deceased, guilt over what happened or what didn't happen.

5) Hostility - Some individuals feel anger at what "caused" the loss of the loved one.

6) Inability to Resume Business-as-Usual Activities - the ability to concentrate on day-to-day activities may be severely limited. It is important to know and recognize that this is a normal phenomenon. A grieving person's entire being - emotional, physical and spiritual, is focused on the loss that just occurred.

7) Reconciliation of Grief - balance in life returns little by little, much like healing from a severe physical wound. There are no set timeframes for healing. Each individual is different.

8) Hope - the sharp, ever present pain of grief will lessen and hope for a continued, yet different life emerges. Plans are made for the future and the individual is able to move forward in life with good feelings knowing they will always remember and have memories of the loved one.

Grieving is difficult work. The following are some suggestion to help in navigating the journey through grief.

- Take time. Do not let others rush you into "getting over" your feelings.
- Do not make major decisions. The time of grief is a time of instability.
- Avoid the temptation to use alcohol or drugs to numb the painful feelings.

Prevent Falls

- Being physically and emotionally fatigued can increase the possibility of a fall
- Being sad is normal, but avoiding fun daily activities for too long can lead to decreased strength and increased risk for falls

