Coping with Grief & Loss

...Understanding Why It’s Important to grieve...

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Grief

What is Grief

• The pain, discomfort, mental and physical feeling that most people feel following the death of a loved one.

• People suffer grief at the loss of anything. It doesn’t just have to be death.

GRIEF IS NORMAL

• Grief is a normal phenomenon common to all of us.

• As we go through life, we experience a wide variety of losses for which we grieve.

• It is not possible to go through life without suffering losses.

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The Five Stages of Grief

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

- The stages don’t always occur in order and people grieve at different rates of time.

- Delayed grief can occur when people suppress the emotions of the death and years later, get depressed.

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Stage 1: Denial

- Refusing to believe a probable death will occur.
- You can help others face it by being available for them to talk instead of forcing them to talk about it.
- In this stage we refuse to believe what has happened. We try in our mind to tell ourselves that life is as it was before our loss.
- We can even make believe to an extent by re-enacting rituals that we used to go through with our loved one.
  - We set an extra plate at the table. We expect them to be there when we get home.
  - We flash back to memories and conversations.
  - These are all part of this stage.
Stage 2: Anger

• Once the diagnosis is accepted as true, anger and hostile feelings like the following can occur:
  – Anger at God for not allowing them to see their kids grow up
    – Anger at the doctors
    – Anger at the family
  – Try not to take it personally. They have a right to be angry, so allow them to express themselves so they can move on in the grieving process.
Stage 3: Bargaining

- The dying person may start to negotiate with God i.e. “I’ll live a healthier life,” “I’ll be a nicer person,” “I was angry so let me ask nicely to please let me live.”

- They may negotiate with the doctor by saying, “How can I get more time so I can live in my dream home, and so on.”

- There is a deep sense of yearning at this stage to be well again.

- Bargaining can be with ourselves or if you are religious with your god.

- Often, we will offer something to try to take away the reality of what really happened.

- We may try to make a deal to have our loved ones back as they were before the tragic event occurred.

- It is only human to want things back as they were before.
Stage 4: Depression

- When reality sets in about their near death, bargaining turns into depression.
  - Fear of the unknown
  - Guilt for demanding so much attention and depleting the family income occurs.
  - Be available to listen instead of cheering them up, or rambling, repetitive talk.
  - Distraction like talk about sports, etc., is good but don’t ignore the situation.

- Depression is a very likely outcome for all people who grieve for a loss.
  - This is the most difficult of the stages to deal with.
  - There can be a feeling of listlessness and tiredness.
    - Outbursts of tears may occur.
    - You may feel like there is no purpose to your life anymore.
    - You may feel like you are being punished.
    - Pleasure and joy may be difficult to express.
    - There may even be thoughts of suicide.
    - If you at any time in this stage, feel like doing yourself harm, professional counseling should be sought.
Stage 5: Acceptance

- When the dying have enough time and support, they can often move into acceptance.
- There is an inner peace about the upcoming death.
- The dying person will want someone who is caring and accepting by his or her side.
- This is the final stage of grief.
- It happens when you know that you have to go on.
- You can accept your loss and now be able to regain your energy and goals for the future.
- It may take some time to get to this stage. But you will get there!
Mourning Process

• Intense Feeling of Loss/Pain
  • Usually occurs two to three months after the loss.
  • The bereaved person may withdraw from the world.

poem:
I missed you today
I will miss you tomorrow
Tears in my eyes
And a heart full of sorrow
I hold on to the memories
Of the great times we had
I grieve for what I lost
But am grateful for what I had
Coping with Crisis

Physical Reactions:
- Numbness
- Tightness in Throat
- Disinterest in Eating
- Can’t Sleep
- Upset stomach
- Pain
- Tired

Emotional Reactions:
- Sense of Unfairness
- Anxiety
- Feeling of Relief
- Stabbing Pain
- Hostility
- Gladness
- Guilt
- Sudden Anger
- Fear
- Anger

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Helping Children Cope

• Be straightforward; distortions can do lasting harm i.e. “he’s gone to sleep” can lead to a fear of sleep or “God took her,” leads to a hate for God.

• Reassure that they are no way to be blamed and will be taken care of.

• Let child participate in the family sorrow and grief.

• Give as much attention to the child who cries as to the one who doesn’t cry.

• Silence between family and friends makes it worse.

• Don’t say, “you are the man of the house now” or “be brave.”

How to Cope with Death

• Allow yourself to grieve by looking at pictures, playing nostalgic music, and reading old letters.

  • Use dance to express how you feel.

  • Use painting/drawing to express your feeling.

  • Imagine how your belief in God or your way of life would help you.

• Funerals, ceremonies, and rituals help people with the grieving process.
Support & Resources

- **Turn to friends and family members** - Now is the time to lean on the people who care about you. Don’t avoiding them, draw friends and loved ones close, spend time together face to face, and accept the assistance that’s offered.

- **Take care of yourself as you grieve**
  - Looking after your physical and emotional needs
  - You can face and express your feelings by using the “Goodbye Letter” & Sentence Completion” worksheets.
  - Make sure you get enough sleep, eating right, and exercising.
  - Don’t use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially, seek support or Mental health service.

- **Mental Health**
  - William Wendt Center For Loss - (202) 624-0010 / https://www.wendtcenter.org/
  - DC Access Helpline - 888-793-4357 - Helps you easily connect to mental health services and its 24-hour, seven-day-a-week (to join support group, find therapist, psychiatrist, and more).
  - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255 - provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention, and crisis resources.

- **Ted Talk/Podcast** - podcaster Nora McInerny shares her hard-earned wisdom about grief and encouraged us on how to move “forward” - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khkJkR-ipfw


- **Audio Meditations** - Relieve stress and anxiety and find inner calm https://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/audio-meditations.htm