



ALL ABOUT GRIEF

GRIEF is a natural and necessary reaction to a significant loss or change in our lives. GRIEF is a healthy, human response to situations such as:

- death of a family member or friend
- separation or divorce
- miscarriage
- injury or disability
- loss of a job, property, a pet
- children leaving home
- moving to a new place
- disappointment in a child
- giving up a dream

It is important to understand grief by facing the reality of your loss and deal with the feelings of fear, loneliness, despair and helplessness. No one can deny that grief is a painful experience, but it's important to believe that the pain will subside.

Sadness is the key stage of the grief process that precedes acceptance. The grief process involves many states, emotional and physical. Grieving is not hanging on to loss but the process of connecting to the new. All of life involves change and all change involves loss. We grieve the losses in an ongoing process of emotional sharing and physical sensitivity growing toward deeper connection.

Grieving fuels the forward movement of our lives. It is essential that one recovers and grows from their grief experience. Learning to accept your grief can make you a stronger person.

The time it takes for an emotional wound to heal varies from person to person, but grieving people commonly experience:

DENIAL - Denial is the anesthetic that enables the shock to be absorbed gradually. Denial is necessary; but when it becomes unyielding and lasts too long, we cannot move on and the healing doesn't happen. **Denial can keep us attached to the loss and prevent new connections.**

FEAR - Most loss creates fear, fear of what we will do after the loss; fear that we caused the loss or will be blamed; fear that we will never heal, understand, reconnect or be happy again; fear of more loss. **The fear can control us and feel too big, immobilizing us.**

BARGAINING - The process of moving through the denial may look like bargaining. We say things like, "Maybe it wasn't that bad" or "if you (God) bring them back I'll go to church" or "they'll be better off, I didn't care that much anyway," and so on. **Bargaining helps to accept loss in stages.**

ANGER - A common and early response to loss is anger at the person or object or whatever is gone. It may be anger at God for the loss, at ourselves for not preventing the loss, or anger at having to go through it all. **Anger can give us strength to get through it.**

GUILT - We feel responsible for the loss and begin to blame ourselves. We think we didn't cherish, love or protect enough; we should have reacted sooner; we should have told the person we loved them, not fought with them, given them more time, showed more care, worked harder - all of the "shoulds" ride with us through this stage. **We can learn to cherish what we have from the guilt of our losses.**

SHAME - We feel bad about who we are and believe we deserve the loss, and that the loss came as a punishment because we deserved to be punished. The loss is proof we are not good enough and it reminds us of the abandonment, the unavailability of caregivers who set up the original internalized shame. **This shame flows out of its hiding place during grieving and can be healed in the sunlight of its new exposure.**

DEPRESSION - A stage of low energy, loss of appetite, sleep problems, loss of interest and flat affect. Some of this slowdown is allowing the healing, some if it is the crash that comes with too much intensity and pain.

EMPTINESS - We feel empty, lost and alone. There is a vacuum, a hollow place inside and a sense that no one cares. The emptiness can move us toward healthy fulfillment.

SADNESS - The pain and tears often come in this stage. The healing is setting in. We may feel overwhelmed and think it won't ever go away, but it does, at least for a while.

ACCEPTANCE - A sense of, "This is what I have been given and I will do with what I have left." **The loss is real, to be felt and accepted.**

FORGIVENESS -- This is **forgiveness of self** for the time we beat ourselves up for what we have or haven't done; **forgiveness of the person gone or those who were involved in the loss and forgiveness of God.**

RECONNECTION - The filling of the empty space. New intimacy and care, including a renewal of interest in life and activities. **A willingness to risk new loss.**

The way you can live with loss and progress through the stages of grieving is by taking care of your emotional and physical needs.

EMOTIONAL NEEDS:

Express your feelings aloud. Holding painful feelings inside may create more problems.

Ask for help when you need it and accept it from those who offer. Relatives and friends want to help, but often don't quite know what to do. Professional help is also available if you need it.

Be kind to yourself and be patient. Some days will be more difficult than others. It is very important to believe that you'll recover. **Avoid making any major decisions until you fully recover from your loss.**

PHYSICAL NEEDS:

Get plenty of rest each day. You'll have more energy to handle problems and to get involved once again in activities you enjoy.

Keep yourself healthy by eating a well-balanced diet and exercising regularly.

You should avoid alcohol, tranquilizers and other harmful substances.

Be alert to problems such as headaches, nausea, dizziness, trembling, heartburn, shortness of breath, weight loss, difficulty sleeping and lack of energy.

Don't be alarmed - these problems probably are stress-related. Do get medical help if they persist.

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