

LOSS & GRIEF

LOSS/BEREAVEMENT

Loss is losing someone or something very close to us. The word bereavement means, 'To be robbed of something valued.'

GRIEF

Grief is a process of adjustment people go through following a loss. This loss could be the death of someone, loss of health, loss of relationships, change in a relationship/organisation, trauma/critical event. For all of these events people usually go through a grieving process.

GRIEF REACTION

These are some of the behaviours people can experience following loss:

- Inability to speak.
- Effected by minor events/changes
- People steer conversation to grief / loss.
- Unwilling to remove marital possessions.
- Somebody who has compatible physical symptoms to the person who has died.
- Radical changes in lifestyle.
- Compulsion to imitate dead person.
- Self- destruction
- Chronic mood changes
- Busyness/distraction

People do not need counselling, necessary, at this time. They may need someone to talk to, for others to be there and listen and/or to 'offload'. Counselling too early can interrupt the natural process of grieving.

STAGES/PHASES OF GRIEF

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross was the first person to suggest that people go through 5 stages of grief. Many people have written about grief and have suggested other stages or phases.

Below is a summary of these:

(1) **Shock:** the initial response to being told of a death. These may include physiological responses such as nausea, vomiting, fainting or psychological traumas such as withdrawal, apathy, confusion or disinhibition.

(2) **Disorganisation:** an inability to think clearly, to arrange the simplest plan. This disorganisation often takes the form of ritualistic 'searching' behaviour.

(3) **Denial:** this is the complete disassociation of the knowledge of the death, an inability to believe, despite the facts. This is often like total amnesia for the event.

(4) **Depression:** usually the result of denial breaking down, the finality of the knowledge sinking in, often accompanied by feelings of unworthiness, helplessness and poverty of ideas.

(5) **Guilt:** a component that no death can escape. Not only feelings of blame for the event, but also that the bereaved has survived or that they might have done something to prevent or cause the death.

(6) **Anxiety:** often connected with coping without the deceased, not being able to control events, including fears for self.

(7) **Aggression:** from irritability to anger, not only directed to yourself or significant others (i.e. doctors and nurses) but also to the deceased for having deserted them.

(8) **Acceptance:** believing that all has been done that can be, saying a final goodbye, and committing the deceased to a memory; continuing life.

(9) **Reintegration:** restarting and eventually, perhaps, replacing, finding substitutes for the deceased and relegating the past and concentrating on the future.

People do experience a number of 'stages' or 'phases' in grief but these are not always followed in order and may be re-visited a number of times. This can depend on the nature of the loss, how the

loss came about and how the individual person responds to loss. People tend to move up and down between the different stages or phases but if the person is processing grief properly they will experience some or all of these stages and eventually move towards the final stages of acceptance and reintegration.

TASKS OF MOURNING

Worden suggests that people have to perform certain tasks when mourning to resolve the grief and move on:

- Accept the reality of the loss
- Experience the pain of the loss
- Adjust to the environment where the deceased is missing
- Move on with life

COMPLICATED GRIEF

This is where the person has not adequately processed their grief and they may have not have experienced all the stages and tasks they have to do to move on. They may have used dramatic changes in their lifestyle or overworking to mask the real feelings of the loss. These signs are usually long term. Common signs that people are experiencing complicated grief may be those of a grief reaction but are often longer and more intense. In addition they may include:

- Phobias about the condition suffered by the bereaved.
- Shrines to the dead person

Unresolved grief leads to psychological disturbance and mental ill health.

ACCUMULATED GRIEF

This is where people have experienced a number of losses of either a period of time or over a shorter time and they have not been able to process these adequately and this can result in mental illness symptoms associated with anxiety and depression. People who have complicated and/or accumulated grief may need the support of a grief counsellor.

'TIME IS A HEALER'

This is a phrase which is often used when people are grieving. Depending on the loss and the reasons around the loss, the grief a person experiences can become less intense as time goes on. 'Usually' 6 to 12 months - intense reactions to loss
'Usually' 3 to 5 years - active mourning
For many people they will always experience a sense of loss, often for many years. Also people may be feeling adjusted to the loss for a short or long time but something might trigger off a grief reaction. This is quite normal and must not be confused with complicated grief.

HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO GRIEVE?

- In many cultures and religions there are grief rituals that people go through. These rituals help people who are grieving to have a framework in which to grieve.
- However, for many people there are no rituals and often people find their own ways of dealing with the loss they feel.
- Funerals are often the places where people can grieve individually and create their own ceremonies around the loss.
- There are no set ways of how you should grieve. Everybody grieves in different ways.

GRIEF TIPS

The following things have helped some people through the process of grief:

Feeling the Pain

This means allowing the array of emotions to be expressed. The pain of grief is very real and as with any pain we try to avoid it; however it is an essential part of the process. Some people will try and avoid the pain by keeping busy or defend themselves against the pain by saying to themselves 'I've got to be strong for everybody else.' Crying about the loss is helpful as it allow painful feelings to be expressed. Some people sometimes feel they are going crazy that they are always crying. This is a common reaction to a loss.

Be Honest with People

People around you may not understand what you need and might not know what to say and what to do. So tell them. If hearing the person's name spoken aloud by others feels good, say so. If you need more time alone or help with things be honest. People can't speak your mind, so you will have to speak it

Talking about it

Talking it over and over and reminiscing helps the loss sink in. Talking about regrets, expressing fears and anger is helpful. If you are the person who is supporting the grieving one, you may just need to be present to listen and encourage them in their talk about the person.

Take one day at a time

This helps to focus on the 'now' and prevents the person from taking on everything at once. Thoughts like, "I should have got over this by now' are not helpful. Grieving takes time and there are no fixed limits and it is not a process that can be hurried.

Anniversaries/Special Dates

These dates will be sensitive to the grieving person. It is often best to plan to mark these times in special ways.

Look after self

This includes self and personal cares. This may include eating, resting and sleeping and finding some social support.

Write a Letter/Diary

Some people have found that writing a letter to the deceased person, expressing feelings, thoughts and memories. People who have lost someone suddenly and have not had time to say good bye have found this helpful.

Reflect and Remember

Take some time during each day to specifically remember the loved one and what you did together, their habits and humour and the good time you had. Looking at photographs also helps to remember the person. Visiting favourite places you shared together also helps.

Create Hope

As time goes on it is helpful to think about the future and what you want to do and achieve without that person. For some people it might be about doing things that they had planned together. For others it is about having new goals about doing things you were not able to do while you were with that person.

Things to Consider

James Miller mentions the following when you are grieving:

- 1) It is not morbid to talk about the person when they have died; it is part of the grief process and is quite natural.
- 2) Some people report that they feel the presence of the deceased around them or visiting them. This too is usual for some people. Research suggests that talking

- with one other person on a regular basis helps the grief process more than anything else.
- 3) An experience of grief can bring to the surface other times when someone or something left us and we felt alone. This can intensify the feelings that are already there. It is also true that your previous losses may not have been fully resolved.
 - 4) Grief cannot be controlled fully but you can take an active role in how your grief unfolds and the forms it takes.
 - 5) Many people report that through the grief experience they have grown stronger, more aware of themselves and more understanding of others.

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