

Impact of Loss: The Grieving Process

When someone who is close or important to us is dying or dies, there is a grieving process we must go through. This is sometimes slow and emotionally painful. Understanding the process and that loss and grief are a natural part of life can help us cope.

The stages of grief are described below. Note that not all people go through all stages or go through some stages so quickly they are hardly noticed. There is no right way to go through these stages, except for with compassion for ourselves and others.

Stages of Grief

Denial and Shock

At first, it may be difficult to accept the death of a loved one/coworker. However, this denial will gradually diminish as you begin to express and share your feelings about the loss and about death and dying with supportive people.

Anger

During this stage the most common question asked is "why?" There may be anger at what you perceive to be the unfairness of death. Some people may project and displace their anger unto others. Try not to do this. When given some social support and acknowledgment of your feelings, you will eventually become less angry and able to move into the next stage of grieving.

Bargaining

Many people try to bargain with God or some sort of higher power. They probably try to offer to give up an enjoyable part of their lives in exchange for the return of health or the lost person.

Guilt

You may find yourself feeling guilty for things you did or didn't do prior to the loss. Forgive yourself. Accept your humanness and be compassionate towards yourself.

Depression

You may at first experience a sense of great loss. Mood fluctuations and feelings of isolation and withdrawal may follow. It takes time gradually return to your old self and become socially involved in what's going on around you. Seek support and comfort from others. Seek professional help if the depression is getting in the way of your day-to-day life.

Loneliness

As you go through changes in your social life because of the loss, you may feel lonely and afraid. The more you are able to reach out to others and make new friends, the more this feeling lessens.

Acceptance

Acceptance does not mean happiness. Instead you accept and deal with the reality of the situation even though it is sad and not what you want it to be.

Hope

Eventually you will reach a point where remembering will be less painful and you can begin to look ahead to the future and more good times.

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Ways to Cope with Death and Dying

- Discuss feelings such as loneliness, anger, and sadness openly and honestly with supportive people and others who are grieving.
- Maintain hope that you will naturally move through the process of grief.
- If your religious convictions are central to your life, talk to a member of the clergy about your beliefs and feelings.
- Join a support group.
- Take good care of yourself. Eat well-balanced meals. Get plenty of rest. Practice compassionate self-talk.
- Be patient with yourself. It takes time to heal. Some days will be better than others.

Ways to Help a Bereaved Coworker

- Be supportive but do not attempt to give encouragement and reassurance when a person is in the depressed stage of grieving. It will likely be misunderstood and sound insensitive.
- Talk openly and honestly about the situation unless the person does not want to.
- Use an appropriate, caring conversational tone of voice.
- Show that you care. Listen attentively and show interest in what the grieving person has to say about his/her feelings and beliefs. Share your feelings and talk about any similar experience you may have had. Avoid using the phrase, "I know just how you feel." Instead try, "Your feelings are understandable. Thank you for sharing with me. It means a lot."
- If symptoms of depression are very severe or persistent and the grieving person is not coping with day to day activities encourage them to get professional help.

NOTES:
