

GRIEF, LOSS, and CHANGE

Beliefs and Values in Our Culture

- ψ Don't show real feelings.
- ψ There is no time for grief, just get back to work.
- ψ If you ignore the feeling, you'll get over it quickly.
- ψ Grievors just want to be left alone.
- ψ Avoid the topic to protect self and others.
- ψ Be strong for others.

The Natural Process of Healing

- ψ The human body has an amazing ability to heal itself.
- ψ A generally healthy person will know intuitively what he/she has to do to promote healing.
- ψ However, any unresolved issues, buried feelings, and hidden conflict will distract a person from knowledge of the healthy path.
- ψ Loss and change is a natural part of life and the body has a built in ability to cope.
- ψ The experience of loss and change:

Intuitive Direction Towards Health

- preoccupies a person
- interferes with normal tasks
- makes a person indecisive
- makes a person quiet, sad, and contemplative
- strong feelings predominate, thoughts become muddled, repetitive.
- draws a person to others who share the same loss and compels the person to talk about the loss
- interruption of normal life extends into days, even weeks.
- from the first moments of the knowledge of loss throughout the experience of grief the person experiences a feeling that things are not real followed by a feeling things have changed forever.

Natural Function

- Grief is important and occupies mental and emotional energy
- Grief requires a time commitment and immediate attention.
- Grief interferes with judgment so important decisions should be postponed.
- Resolving grief requires repeatedly reviewing the thoughts and feelings of the loss.
- Grief is an emotional process, not an intellectual one. Staying with one's feelings is the necessary means to resolving the experience.
- Repeatedly sharing thoughts, memories and feelings about the loss facilitates obtaining new perspectives, an evolving understanding of the loss, and its impact.
- The process of integration the experience loss into one's perception of one's self and the world requires time to review, contemplate, sleep, and return to the task over significant time. The more difficult the loss or losses, the more time required and the more intense the experience.
- The process of grief is the stuff of major personal change and growth. Integrating the loss into one's life and world view changes a person towards greater adaptability, strength of character and finely tunes life's priorities.

Stages of Grief

- ψ Grief is a personal experience that is largely unique from one person to another.
- ψ It has no order or clearly identified steps that follow one after another.
- ψ There are commonalities to the experience that are inherent to the healing process.
- ψ Understanding the process can help you get back on track if life, your family's culture or relationships get you off track.

The Loss

- Losses can be obvious or evident only to the person experiencing the loss.
- Losses can be related to age, development, personal growth, success, failure or an inevitable part of life.
- Losses can be temporary or permanent.
- Examples include death, separation, divorce, job loss or start, money, moving, vacations, roles, self image, natural disasters, crimes, rape, assault, pets, leaving home or school, a natural part of aging, or the ravages of illness.
- A common experience of people suffering from mental illness is the loss of long term goals or dreams.

Protest

Denial

- shock, incapacitation.
- lack of feeling, numbness.
- can't believe it.
- serves to protect in the short run
- ignoring the loss over the long run will lead to unexpected emotional disruptions in function.

Anger

- "Why me?" Attempts to make sense out of the part that makes no sense.
- angry blaming for real or imagined responsibility.
- jealousy of those who have no loss or are perceived to have less of a loss.
- anger at the person lost.

Sadness

- spontaneous crying, sobbing, wailing.
- desolate pining.
- fears of losing control.
- feeling the need for protection.

Physical/Somatic Symptoms

- sleeplessness.
- loss of appetite, taste
- headaches, nausea, backaches, diarrhea, vomiting, choking sensations, shortness of breath, lack of strength.
- panic.

Guilt

- feeling you've done something wrong or are responsible for the loss, whether true or false.
- identifying regrets about actions you now wish you had done in the immediate or distant past.
- loss of complicated and ambivalent relationships can be particularly guilt provoking.

Despair

Disorientation

- "How will I survive? How do I go on?"
- Increased anxiety, even panic experiences.
- sensing, feeling, hearing or even seeing the lost person.
- increasing dependency on others.
- wandering, searching for the lost item/person.

Disorganization

- forgetfulness.
- loss of concentration.

Facilitating the Grief Process

"The only way out of grief is through."

- Recognize What Is Happening**
 - Your inner world is a construction zone and slow down.
 - Recognize you need to talk about your loss.
 - Seek out others who share your loss or who have shared a similar loss.
 - Recognize when your support system is insufficient to give you what you need. Seek help from grief groups, spiritual direction, medical care, counseling or therapy.
- Expect Highs and Lows**
 - You will recover, but the road to recovery is never a straight line. It's more like a winding rough road with ruts, rocks and trees across the road.
 - Progress can feel like two steps forward, one step back. Be patient with the temporary setbacks.
- Pamper Yourself**
 - Give yourself something pleasant and take a periodic break from grief.
 - Avoid drugs or alcohol unless prescribed by your physician.
 - Give yourself little gifts, pleasant distractions, a change of environment.
 - Then set aside your distraction and get back to your grief work.
 - Eat healthy sufficient meals. Don't avoid eating or over eat.
 - Drink plenty of fluids.
 - Get some exercise, especially if you feel irritable. Vigorous exercise can take the edge off of your mood.
 - Listen to your body and respect what it tells you.
 - Seek help when you need it.
 - If sleep is a problem, talk to your physician about it.
 - Remember your spiritual connections.
- Have a Beginner's Mind**
 - Be open to the new lessons you can learn from your loss.
 - Loss is a natural part of life, a challenge to learn and understand life from a new perspective. It's a time to redefine the value of your own life and re-evaluate what is most important.
- Keep a Journal**
 - Writing down your thoughts and feelings can help you find the new lessons you will learn and better observe what's happening.
 - Writing out methodically your experiences and reflecting on them can empower you to gain new insights, recognize fresh opportunities, and move in new directions.
- Practice the Virtue of Endurance**
 - Don't hide, shirk or flee from your pain.
 - Endure what cannot be changed.
 - Live by the reality that you will survive and grow stronger and be a better person because of your experience.

Establish Goals for Yourself

- At first, it is enough to get out of bed on a schedule and go about your basic cares and household chores.
- Gradually add back in the essential tasks in your life.
- If you can postpone returning to work until you are feeling stronger. If you can't, set aside time every day to grieve.
- As acceptance emerges from the pain, set some goals beyond your previous life. You are after all a new person, stronger, with a better sense of what is important in life.
- Great loss has at times inspired important missions that better your life and the lives of others.

Spend Your Time With Whom You Feel Most Comfortable.

People are of two types:

- those that energize you, make you feel creative and focused on your goals.
- those that exhaust you, make apprehensive, or who make you doubt yourself.

Share With Others What Helps and What Doesn't

- Many people struggle with grief and really don't know how to help themselves much less someone else.
- If you need to talk about your loss, say so.
- If you need more time alone, let people around you know.

Create Meaning and Purpose From Your Loss

- Those who recover most heartily from losses are those who work hardest to create meaning and purpose out of the loss.
- If there is not an obvious task at hand related to your loss, create one. Something symbolic like writing a letter to the deceased or listing all the consequences of the loss and things you can do to compensate. Write poetry or a song about your pain. Journal daily about your process of grieving creating an outline of your progress and set backs. Light a candle for your lost one, create a memory book of photos or written memories, visit places you've shared, decorate a place in your home in memory of your loss, or create a memory box of items that were special.
- Everything we experience we learn from, especially those things that are particularly hard and/or emotional. Find things you can do to enhance your learning.
- Engage your soul. Some do this through prayer, others through meditation, and yet others spend time alone with nature. Find your own unique way to engage your soul.

Never Give Up

- Dale Carnegie, the author of How to Win Friends and Influence People said, "Success is 90% persistence, 10% talent." You don't need a lot of talent to succeed at whatever your goal is, you just need to keep trying.
- Expect the good to come out of the bad. Pain has a way of purifying the soul, teaching us what is most important, and making us better people.

What Not To Say To Someone Who Is Grieving

- ψ Preacher syndrome
 - "God has a plan for everything."
 - "God needed him/her more."
 - "Did she make her peace with God before she died?"
 - "It was for the best."
- ψ Only for intensely close relationships
 - "At least he/she has no more pain."
 - "It must be such a relief."
- ψ Presuming too much
 - "I know what you're going through."
 - "I know exactly how you feel."
- ψ Denial
 - "You seem to be taking this well."
 - "Children just don't understand."
- ψ Intolerance/No support
 - "Get over it."
 - "So what have you been doing now that you have the house to yourself?"
 - "Go back to work, take up a hobby, it will distract you."
 - "Now you can make a fresh start."
 - "It could be worse, at least"
 - "You'll feel better soon."
 - "You can't just mope around.... Cheer up!"

What You Can Say And Do

For the helper or coaching your helper:

- ψ Make contact with the griever. Don't let your discomfort, fear, or uncertainty keep you from making contact.
- ψ Listen and accept feelings and words without judgment.
- ψ Be patient, there is no appropriate length of time for grieving.
- ψ Model self-care. Be realistic and positive; maintain your own life and responsibilities.
- ψ Seek help when you feel overwhelmed or unsure how to handle a situation.
- ψ "I care."
- ψ "I'm here for you."
- ψ If you mean it, "I love you."
- ψ Be honest, "I can't imagine what it's like for you. I just can't imagine how hard this is for you."
- ψ "I can't fully understand what you are feeling, but I can offer my support."
- ψ "You are important to me."
- ψ Don't assume that she copes with things the same way you do. Let her cope in her own way.
- ψ Let her know you are thinking about her. A card or a phone call can make the difference.
- ψ Say nothing. Just listen. Sometimes just listening is the best thing to do.

Dare to Dream...

*Dreams are what we fantasize about as children,
they are the roles we play as we pretend to be the heroes in our fantasies,
the symbols of the heroes in our lives.*

*They are the substance of the rambling thoughts
we think about as we stare out the window.*

*Dreams are what we think about
when are feeling encouraged, enthusiastic, and energetic.*

Dreams are not goals or objectives.

*Dreams are built on our values,
house what is most important to us,
and merely suggest realistic goals that might be within our reach.*

*Dreams are painted by each goal achieved,
shaped by each reassessment of life's direction.*

*They are the manifestation of our mission,
the embodiment of our personhood and values.*

*They are the core of our hopefulness,
our sense of purpose,
the rudder of our boat.*

Dreaming can be scary business.

*Many don't dare for fear of never tasting their dreams.
But the best part of dreaming isn't reaching what we imagine,
it's the process of getting there.*

Dreaming is like gazing into a mirror that looks into the future.

Each time we step into the reflection,

the image changes into a more real possibility.

Every experience we've had along our journey has enriched us immeasurably.

What we seek evolves everyday from the presence of those we meet.

*We too change with every experience,
and our dream unfolds and reshapes with us.*