

GETTING THROUGH TIMES OF GRIEF AND LOSS

All of us have experienced or will experience significant losses during our lifetime. Grief is a normal and natural response to such a loss. We expect to grieve when someone we love dies, but many other losses can also trigger a grief reaction. These include things such as the end of a relationship, giving up a cherished life goal, migration of a close friend or the loss of emotionally significant objects.

Learning to come to terms with a significant loss is not an easy task. Here are some things that may be of help when we (or our friends) are grieving.

1. **Understand what are "normal" responses to a significant loss.** Although people vary a lot in the way they respond, there are many common experiences -

- ◆ Tears
- ◆ Intense sadness
- ◆ Numbness
- ◆ Withdrawal from others
- ◆ Irritability
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating
- ◆ Guilt - the "if only"s
- ◆ Anger - at many different people and at God
- ◆ Loss of appetite
- ◆ Sleep disturbance
- ◆ Loss of energy

2. **Understand the tasks involved in grieving -**

- ***Accepting the finality of the loss.*** Even with a death, many people will keep hoping for a while that it is not true. Also many people try to keep a relationship going even after they have come to recognize that it is unlikely to work.

Acknowledging and expressing all the feelings we experience as a result of the loss.

Because some feelings are not as socially accepted as others, we may tend to keep these to ourselves. It may be easier to express our anger than our fear of loneliness when a relationship breaks up. However all our feelings need to be acknowledged if

- we are to be able to deal with them well.
- ***Adjusting to a life in which the lost person, object or experience is absent.*** Many people try to live as if nothing has changed when someone dies. This slows down the healing process which requires that we adjust our life to take in the new reality.

- ***Becoming free to reinvest our emotional energy in other relationships.*** To do this we have to detach our emotions from the person we have lost. It does not mean we abandon our good memories or love the person who died less, but it does mean that we are now open to finding new sources of nurture and support.

3. Understand the actions that can help -

- Reach out to others for support. Tell them what you need so they can help.
- Don't expect to "get over" the loss quickly. Healing takes time.
- Express yourself. Reminisce with family. Talk to friends. Write your feelings in a journal.
- Take good care of yourself physically. Eat properly. Rest even if you do not sleep. Exercise. Avoid self-medicating with alcohol or drugs (even prescribed ones).
- Return to your usual routine when that is possible. There is comfort in the familiar. Avoid making major life changing decisions at this time.
- Plan for special days such as anniversaries and holidays as feelings can be particularly intense at those times.
- Plan to do something you enjoy and allow yourself to do it without feeling guilty. Try new activities also.
- Reach out to others. Share your time and when it is appropriate share your experiences.
- Draw strength from your faith when you can. However for many people a loss tests their faith. Whether your faith feels stronger or weaker, feel free to tell God exactly what is on your mind.

“Be patient. Grief takes a long time, but love lasts forever.”

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