



Grief and Loss

Grief is normal. All of us grieve after a loss. The tears, sadness and pain of mourning are common after a significant loss, especially the loss of a loved one, friend or coworker.

Grief is a healing process. The time it takes for heal varies. Grief is a process like a road that one must travel to heal. As you travel the road, slowly but surely the pain and sadness will subside.

Seeking Professional Help

With some losses, you may find that the way back is too difficult for you to handle on your own. Sometimes the hurt is so great that you need professional help.

Chronic grief is intense grief that goes on and remains unchanged for many months or years. The stages along the road of grief do not subside, and some of the responses may even escalate in intensity. You continue to have great distress when anything reminds you of the loss. This is chronic grief and indicates the need for professional help.

Depressive illness can sometimes occur with a loss. Life may seem meaningless or not worth continuing. If you or a loved one experiences prolonged or deepening depression, professional help should be sought.

- The first few hours or days you may feel shocked, numb, or confused.
- When the shock wears off, you understand that the loss happened and may react with anger towards your religion, yourself, the deceased individual, or loved ones.
- You may start to have feelings of depression when the full impact of the loss is realized; this can be the most painful stage of healing.
- You will start to feel the first signs of relief when you are able to reorganize your life without your loved one.
- The final stage is reinvesting in activities and other relationships after some time has passed.
- Remember that you are not alone, and many others have shared the same feelings of grief. This does not mean that your 'grief journey' is any less painful but it can help you understand that grief is a normal, and necessary process.

Common Feelings with Grief

Numbness Denial: It is very difficult to accept the reality of a sudden loss that may be from natural causes or a tragic event. Numbing and denial are very normal ways we emotionally protect ourselves. It is a period of "resting" before we get prepared to deal with the loss.

Distress and Anger: Once the loss or death is confirmed and accepted, the numbness slowly subsides, and you may begin to feel the normal distress of the loss. Often intense, distress can be very painful, and it may be experienced in physical ways such as weakness, fainting, difficulty breathing, and an upset stomach. It is very normal to feel anger, and this can be very intense. Acknowledge your anger, accept it as normal, talk about it, and you can even express it in non-destructive ways (hitting a pillow, yelling). As your hurt heals, your anger will lessen and go away.

Guilt: It is not uncommon to blame yourself and to feel guilty. You may feel remorse about things you did or did not do ("If only I had"). These feelings are normal and although painful, it is an important stage on the road of emotional recovery.

Depression: You may feel exhausted, mentally drained, and you may find it difficult to concentrate or think clearly. This is normal. Proper rest, good nutrition, and exercise will help. Begin taking small steps to get involved in life again, and you can list things you would like to do and start one thing at a time.

Loneliness: You may feel isolated, that no one understands, or that you cannot make it without the person you lost. This is a common feeling and completely normal. As you start to get involved with life again, you can share your feelings about your loss with family, friends and peers, and the loneliness will begin to lessen.

Hope and Acceptance: It may seem impossible now, but hope will come again. Gradually the pain and sadness will subside, and this provides a path for acceptance. As you continue to recover in your grief, it is less painful as your emotional wounds are healing.

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