

Coping with Grief and Loss



A Recovery Lesson

Introduction



- Grief and loss are natural parts of life, but they can seem even more overwhelming when you also have a mental illness.
- We'll discuss some ways to help you get through the painful times and keep your recovery on track.
- Grief and loss is a process that can lead to acceptance.
- Healthy grief can even bring meaning and growth to your life.

Goals and Objectives



- To be more aware of grief and loss, and its effects on your recovery. To cope with grief and loss in healthier ways.
 - To describe 2 ways you respond to grief and loss
 - To list a protective factor you have (that helps you avoid complicated grief)
 - To discuss how you can cope better with grief or loss
 - Optional: To rate your grief by completing a Grief Checklist

What are grief and loss?



- Grief
 - Deep distress caused by loss or bereavement (loss of a loved one by death)
- Loss
 - Losing something you possessed
 - Being deprived of something because of separation
- Sorrow
 - Deep distress, sadness, or regret, especially for the loss of something (or someone)



What happens when people grieve?



- Sadness comes from being suddenly, painfully deprived of something.
- If they lost someone they loved, there is heartache (even if that person was suffering at the end of life).
- There is fear because the survivor's world has changed and what is ahead is unknown.
- There is insecurity as "their world is crumbling."
- People that are usually strong may cry, they may say or do impulsive things, or "go to pieces."
- They may not know where to go, or who to turn to.



Myths and Facts about grief



- **Myth:** The pain of loss will go away faster if you ignore it.
- **Fact:** Trying to ignore the pain of grief will only make it worse. – Face it and find true healing.
- **Myth:** You should “be strong” when you are grieving.
- **Fact:** Sadness, fear, or loneliness are some of the many normal reactions to loss. Crying or “breaking down” doesn’t mean you are weak.
- Rather than putting on a “brave front,” show your true feelings. Then, other people can help you (and sometimes you can also help them).

More Myths and Facts



- **Myth:** If you don't cry, it means you aren't grieving.
- **Fact:** Crying is a normal response, but it's not the only one. People who don't cry may feel the pain of loss just as deeply, but have other ways of showing it. – They need just as much support and comfort.
- **Myth:** Grief should last about a year.
- **Fact:** There is no right time frame for grieving. How long it takes to recover from loss is different for everyone.



More Myths and Facts



- **Myth:** Moving on with your life means you are forgetting about the one you lost.
- **Fact:** Moving on means you have accepted your loved one's death. - That isn't the same as forgetting. Your loved one's memory will always be a part of you.
- **Myth:** It is best to not talk about the person that died.
- **Fact:** People usually want and need to talk about their loss – maybe even over and over. It's OK to talk about it, but don't pry or force the conversation.

More Myths and Facts



- **Myth:** Saying “I know how you feel” is a good way to express sympathy.
- **Fact:** People grieve in different ways. You can’t possibly know what another person is going through after a loss.
- It may seem like you are “making light of” how deep the person’s pain truly is.
- If you don’t know what to do or say, try asking the person what would help them.
- Just being with them and listening to them is the most important way to help.

Discussion



- *Do other people grieve the same way as you do? - No. There are a lot of different ways people can grieve.*
- *How do you feel when you are grieving?*
- There are many “normal” grief emotions and physical symptoms on the next slide:



Some normal grief emotions



- Sad
- Hurt
- Horrified
- Afraid
- Miserable
- Lonely
- Shocked
- Questioning
- Thoughtful
- Overwhelmed
- Irritable
- Regretful
- Surprised
- Angry
- Numb
- Disappointed
- Envious
- Undecided
- Relieved
- Frustrated
- Self-blame
- Anxious



Some physical grief symptoms:



- Tightness in chest/throat
- Feeling breathless or dizzy
- Heart palpitations (feeling a racing or pounding heartbeat)
- Overly sensitive to noise
- Nothing seems real
- Weak or tense muscles
- Lack of energy, fatigue
- Dry mouth, queasy stomach, or nausea
- Feeling like there is a lump in your throat
- Headaches

Normal thoughts when grieving for someone who died may include:

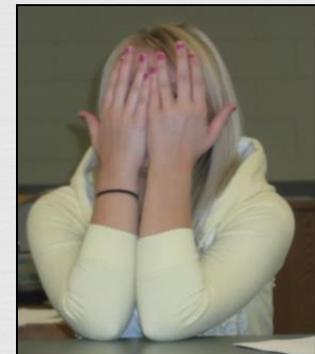


- Disbelief – It feels like nothing that is happening is real
- Anger and blaming
- Confusion
- Being unable to concentrate
- Thinking “too much” about the person who died
- Sense of the person who died being there with you
- Dreaming about the person who died
- Feeling of “going crazy”
- Sadness or depression

Some normal grief behaviors:



- Not being able to sleep
- Poor appetite
- Crying
- Sighing or yawning a lot
- Being “absent-minded” and not organized
- Restless or overactive
- Social withdrawal
- Doing things like the person who died



Why do people grieve differently?



- **Gender** – Males and females are taught different ways to handle stress and emotions.
- **Age and life experiences** – Your understanding of death and your sense of self is important to how you experience a loss.
- **Culture and faith** – Beliefs, responses, and rituals may help to honor someone who has died.
- **Personality** – Coping with a loss can be different if a person is outgoing, shy, expressive, or withdrawn.



Possible reactions from others



- **Apathy** – Not seeming concerned - *“I’m tired of hearing about it. I’ve done all I can. You have to deal with it yourself.”*
- **Sympathy** – Feeling sorry for, and always being there to do things for the other person - *“You poor thing. Let me do that for you so you don’t have to.”*
- **Empathy** – Having compassion and relating to someone
 - Entering into their feelings (but not taking them upon yourself).
 - *“Walking in their shoes.” Supporting them without judging.*
 - *“This is a really tough time for you, and I want to help you get through it.”*

Discussion



- *Which reaction from other people seems to be the most helpful?*
- *How would you want people to respond to you when you are grieving?*
- *How did people respond when you experienced grief or loss?*
- *What are some things that you grieve about that are not deaths?*

Other losses that could cause grief



- A distressing childhood, an unhappy family life, or a divorce
- Illness, disability, emotional or behavior problems, natural disasters or accidents
- Financial problems or loss of a job can sometimes cause a loss of both self-respect and security.
- Damage (physical and relationship losses) can be caused by addictive behavior
- Loss of privacy
- Not getting credit for what you do – Not feeling “good enough”
- Unable to work, or when retiring – May feel less self-worth
- Older children moving out – having an “empty nest”

Take a mindfulness break



- Sit comfortably and take some deep breaths.
- Watch **Positive Thinking Slideshow** on YouTube.com (2:41 minutes at <http://youtu.be/QETqNwmmImS> and discuss whether or not you agree with the last quotation.



Stages of the Loss Process



- Grief is natural after a loss, or a death - A person has “grief work” to do.
- Remember, “Sorrow is the price for having loved someone.” (If you didn’t care about them, you would not be grieving.)
- The 5 stages of loss originally described by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross can happen in any order:
 - Denial
 - Bargaining
 - Anger
 - Despair
 - Acceptance

Stages of Loss



- **Stage 1 – Denial**
- *“It didn’t happen. When I wake up, everything will be OK.”*
- People may act childlike, and want to be reassured that nothing is wrong, or to withdraw from, avoid, or reject the truth.
- **Stage 2 – Bargaining**
- *“If things will go back to the way they were, I will do whatever I’m supposed to do.”*
- *“I’ll keep looking for a way to make things right – I need answers.”*
- People may ignore real needs to pursue a “cure.”
- They may try to change things, to stop the loss from happening.

More Stages of Loss



- **Stage 3: Anger**
- *“I am angry with God, the insurance company, and the doctors.”*
- *“I should have... I could have...”*
- *“It was their fault. I blame them for her death.”*
- *“How could she leave us?”*
- Sometimes people are aggressive along with their anger, and it may be directed at the closest “target.”
- They may have resentment toward the people involved.
- Resolve anger by letting it out. – If it is held in, it can lead to depression, or it can drain our emotional energy.

More Stages of Loss



- **Stage 4 - Despair**
- *“I am overwhelmed, and hurt. I’ll never be able to enjoy life again.”*
- *“ I feel like I am in a deep, dark place. All I can do is cry.”*
- *“When I sit silently, I think about death or depressing things.”*
- *“Somehow it was my fault. I’m being punished for the bad things I did.”*
- *“God doesn’t care about me, or it wouldn’t have happened.”*
- People need support as they work through despair and begin to cope.

More Stages of Loss



- **Stage 5 - Acceptance**
- *“Now I understand what happened and how it affects me.”*
- *“I know that I need help.”*
- *“I will do what it takes to get through this. Let’s talk about my options.”*
- We become more kind and patient with ourselves, expressing emotions freely, and knowing that personal growth can come from experiencing losses.
- We adjust our lives after a loss, and base our decisions on reality, instead of irrational beliefs or fantasy.

The “Don’ts” of Grief

(By Sister Monica Ann Lucas)



- **Don’t condemn** or say “if only.”
- **Don’t dwell on nagging doubts or blame.**
- No one can predict what might happen or prevent all bad things.
- You can’t truly change the behavior and actions of others (unless they want to change).
- **Don’t drug yourself** to postpone the reality and expression of grief.
- **Don’t feel sorry for yourself.** – It makes you feel worse.
- **Don’t run away.** – Face the problem before “getting away for a while.”

More “Don’ts of Grief



- **Don’t withdraw** – You need the strength of others, and the world needs you in it.
- Make a special effort to restore healthy spirituality.
- **Don’t pay too much attention to what others say** – People who are trying to be helpful may say something like “It is better this way,” when it would have been better to say nothing. **Don’t get distressed by words.**
- **Don’t cross bridges until you come to them.** – You may have fear and anxiety if you look too far into the future.
- **Don’t underestimate yourself.** – Your strength may surprise you.

Risk factors and protective factors



- The outcome of bereavement can be affected by:
 - The situation being sudden, or if it was an expected loss
 - Personal factors, like whether or not you are emotionally unstable, or if you are coping well
 - Social factors, like whether or not you have emotional support from family and friends
 - Protective factors such as having religious beliefs, and good self-esteem.
- *Optional discussion: Name one of your protective factors.*

Optional Discussion



- Read **A Grief Story**.
- *“What helped the person in the story cope with grief and loss?”*
- *“Was the grieving normal?”*
- *“How would you know if it was abnormal or unhealthy?”*
- *“What are some irrational thoughts that people can have when they are grieving?”*

Irrational beliefs about despair



- *I have to stay strong and in control - It's not ladylike (or manly) to cry in public.*
- *Life is supposed to be fair. - No one should have to hurt like this.*
- *No one else can help. They don't understand how I'm feeling.*
- *I must be going crazy. - It can't be normal to feel this way.*
- *I shouldn't be crying anymore, after so much time has passed.*
- *I have to get back to what I was doing. - That way I won't have to think about it.*

Negative responses to despair



- Grief can lead to or worsen depression, anxiety, or other illnesses. Sometimes it includes:
 - Violence
 - Chemical dependency or other addictions
 - Extreme risk-taking or self-destructive behavior
 - Self-blame
- Overwhelming, unhealthy despair can lead to suicide.
- Couples may break up if one of them can't resolve their despair.



Discussion



- “Although people often blame themselves or feel guilty about deaths of a loved one, is it usually a realistic, rational thought?” No.
- “How would you respond to someone who feels guilty after someone they care about dies?” Listen closely to their concerns, then reassure them that it wasn’t their fault.
 - “You would have kept them safe and alive if you had the ability to control what happened.”
 - “Sometimes bad things happen to good people.”

Effects of complicated grief



- Research on people who lost a spouse showed a link between complicated/traumatic grief, disability, and using too few health services.
- People in the traumatic grief group had an episode of major depression, high blood pressure, and more disability (Prigerson et al, 2001).
- Research showed that people with complicated grief identified more life stressors, less social support, and decreased mental health and well-being.
- They had less ability to function in life's roles, and more symptoms of health problems (Ott, 2003).

Find meaning



- Try to make sense of your loss with your beliefs and view of the world. - If it doesn't make sense, try to look at the loss in other ways:
 - The person may have relief (if pain and suffering had ended).
 - You can continue a connection through good memories.
- Look at any positive benefits, like:
 - Growth in character or spiritual growth
 - Strengthening relationships
 - Being able to see things in new ways



Conclusion



- Grief and loss are a part of people's lives that can't be avoided unless you never care about anything or anyone.
- Grieving in a healthy way is important for your health, relationships, and mood.
- Using the coping skills you have learned can increase your sense of self-control.
- Working through grief and loss by getting the help you need can help you grow as a person and find its meaning.
- Learning to handle grief in a healthy way can help prevent having a relapse during your recovery.

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