



Grief

Grief can affect every aspect of a person's being, and at times can be so intense as to feel overwhelming. For a person to experience grief it is not necessary for a death to have occurred. There are many forms of loss: • loss of employment • permanent physical injury • loss of a relationship • loss of a lifestyle • financial loss ...A road accident may bring about any or all of these losses.

Trauma can impact a person in a variety of ways, they include:

Thoughts	Feelings	Behaviour	Physical
disbelief	fear	withdrawal	nausea
denial	depression	difficulty sleeping	hollow stomach
blame	shock	restlessness	reduced energy level
disorientation	anger	pacing	lump in the throat
slowed thinking	anxiety	relationship difficulties	headache
poor attention	guilt	lethargy	weakness
difficulty making decisions	isolation	drinking	dry mouth
hallucinations	numbness	decrease in activity	sensations of unreality
preoccupying thoughts "loss"	helplessness	erratic movement	heartburn
... "If only"	despair	forgetting	pain
... "I should have"	frustration	talking about the loss	illness
... "I'm going mad"	relief	loss of self-care	sad, confused, yearning

The process of grief, and what we need to do to get through it:

Time

- days, weeks, months and even years to allow the pain to lessen.
- time alone and time with trusted others who will listen.

Permission

- permission to feel and express the intense feelings that are a part of grief.
- permission to be alone or with others as you choose.
- permission to cry.



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Support

- warmth, friendship and understanding from those who care about you
- knowing that support services are available when extra assistance is necessary

Routine

- to take refuge in the 'normal' and 'everyday'
- to accept support from others in the daily routines of life to lessen the strain where necessary
- to be released from making major decisions during the time of early grief

Rest, relaxation, exercise and nourishment

- grief is an exhausting experience; your body needs extra care and attention. Even though you may experience a decrease in appetite and therefore be eating less, it is important to ensure the food that you do eat is nutritious
- self care is important - hot baths, daytime naps, walking, connecting with people you care about, or special time alone

Goals

- goals help to provide a sense of purpose, and the setting of small goals during grief can provide a sense of direction during a time in which everything seems 'at sea'
- arrange a meeting with a friend; go to the movies or for a picnic

Hope

- sharing with those who have suffered a similar loss may help you understand your feelings and allow you to see that the pain will lessen with time, as it has for them

Permission to regress

- as you begin to adjust to your changed life, to feel some easing of the pain, it is common to experience moments or days of fresh despair
- the experience of grief in waves advancing and receding is a natural part of the grief process, and also a part of the healing

Acceptance

- things will never be the same again
- life will be forever different. And yet life will go on and you will again find meaning and happiness
- the loss will always be a part of you, but the dark clouds of pain and grief will move on and you will feel the sun again



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After experiencing such a loss a person is forced to deal with a different life, to which significant adjustments may need to be made. It is important to recognise and remember that each person's grief reaction is unique. Only you know exactly what the loss feels like to you and what it means for you. Don't try to fit the mould others create for how you should be grieving, or force others to grieve in the same way as you.

Mal McKissock, a bereavement counsellor and educator states that there are important principles to remember in relation to grief:

- "It is . . . healthy to express the intense and painful emotions relating to loss."
- "Grieving is important for healing the wound of separation."
- "A bereaved person may experience a wide range of feelings..."
- "The painful feelings will diminish with time. If they remain intense and prolonged, then professional help may be required."
- "A total absence of grief - when a person carries on as though nothing has happened - is not a healthy sign and also may indicate the need for professional help."
- "A bereaved person who has not successfully grieved is more prone to illness, both physical and psychological."

C.S. Lewis, the famous writer and philosopher described what grief was to him in the following word picture (1961)

"There is something new to be chronicled every day. Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape, not every bend does. Sometimes the surprise is the opposite one; you are presented with exactly the same sort of country you thought you had left behind miles ago. That is when you wonder if the valley isn't a circular trench. But it isn't. There are partial recurrences, but the sequence doesn't repeat."



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