



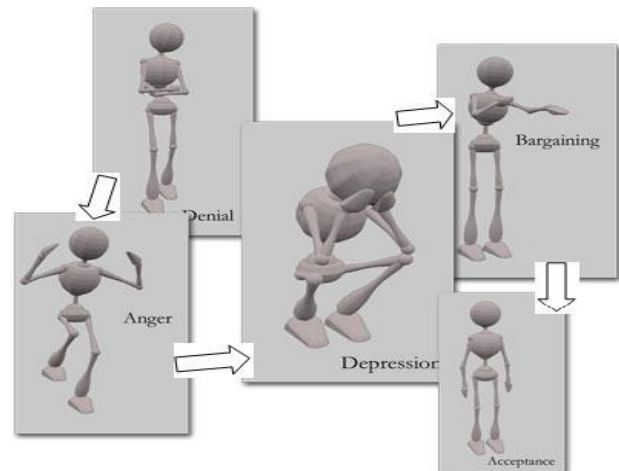
Coping With Grief and Loss

Common Reactions to Loss

Dealing with death can be difficult, but the sense of loss and grief which follows is a natural and important part of life. No two people react exactly alike to a loss. For many, however, the most immediate response to the death of a friend/loved one is shock, numbness, and a sense of disbelief. Physical reactions such as heart palpitations, tightness in the throat, shortness of breath, sweating, and dizziness are common. At other times in the grieving process you may experience such physical symptoms as upset stomach, sleep and appetite disturbance or a lack of energy. Also, you may be more susceptible to illness, nightmares and dreams about the deceased person. Emotional reactions may include a preoccupation with the image of the deceased, feelings of guilt, hostility, fearfulness, apathy, self-doubt, and emptiness. Loss of sexual drive, depressed mood, anger at the deceased for dying, a lack of concentration and extreme sadness may occur.

How to Help Yourself

- Participate in rituals/say goodbye. Ceremonies and rituals help us to move toward accepting and integrating our loss. Attending the funeral or memorial service may be helpful. As time passes, people find marking significant dates (birthdays, anniversaries) healing as well.
- Care for yourself physically. Remember the basics. Get adequate rest, eat, drink water, and exercise.
- Care for yourself emotionally. Give yourself permission to grieve. Allow quiet time alone to reflect and to explore and experience your thoughts and feelings. Allow time to heal without setting unrealistic goals and deadlines. Resist/delay making major decisions/changes in your life.
- Express your feelings. Allow opportunities to express the full range of your emotions. This includes sadness, but also perhaps, fears, guilt, anger, resentment, and even relief. Allow yourself to cry.
- Seek support. Using social support is essential. Support from others reduces isolation and loneliness and increases one's sense of security, safety and attachment. Talk to friends openly about your loss. If religion or spirituality is important to you, talk with a member of the clergy or a spiritual advisor.



Factors That May Interfere with Resolving Your Grief

- Avoiding your emotions
- Over-activity to the point of exhaustion
- Using alcohol or other drugs to mask the grief
- Unrealistic promises made to the deceased
- Unresolved grief from a previous loss
- Judgmental relationships
- Acting resentful to those who try to help

How to Help a Friend

- Talk openly. Speak to the bereaved person about his/her loss and feelings instead of trying to avoid the topic. Don't try to offer false cheer or minimize the loss.
- Be available. Call, stop by to talk, share a meal or activity. Your presence and companionship are important.
- Listen/be patient. Listening is one of the most important things you can offer. Allow the bereaved person to vent feelings. Don't judge the person's thoughts or feelings. Don't feel you need to offer advice. Listening itself is very powerful.
- Take some action. Send a card, write a note, call. This is important not just immediately after the loss, but especially later, when grief is still intense but when others have resumed their daily lives and support for the bereaved may dwindle.
- Encourage self-care. Encourage your friend to care for themselves physically, emotionally, and socially. Encourage your friend to seek out support and/or professional help, if appropriate.
- Accept your own limitations. Accept that you cannot eliminate the pain your friend is experiencing. Grief is a natural, expected response to loss and each person must work through it in his/her own way and at his/her own pace. Be supportive, but care for yourself too!



Resources

- Individual Counseling at PACS (call or walk in to schedule an appointment)
- There are many online resources that offer information and help. Some you may want to check out are:

Students of AMF: healgrief.org/actively-moving-forward

Open to Hope: mastersincounseling.org/loss-grief-bereavement.html

Light a Candle: gratefulness.org/light-a-candle/



"All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on" - Havelock Ellis



Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS)

3 Garrison Avenue, Smith Hall - 3rd Floor, Durham, NH 03824

Tel: 603-862-2090 Website: www.unh.edu/pacs

Material adapted from <http://students.umw.edu/caps/links-to-umw-brochures-other-resources/coping-with-grief-and-loss/>
And <http://www.hsc.edu/Student-Life/Wellness-Center/Counseling-Services/Self-Help-and-Screenings/Death-Loss-and-Grief.html>