

GRIEVING: RECOGNITION & RESPONDING

GOAL:

To present the meaning of grieving and how to support and comfort others during the grieving process.

FORWARD:

I hit an unintended button on my computer, and there she was—my youngest daughter's pictures who passed away over a year ago. The memories are haunting. The love is intense. Now, I think of others who experience such unhappy life experiences and wonder if we, as those experiencing grief and observers of other's tragedy, truly understand how to help each other (mostly ourselves) through such a nightmare of grief.

CAUSES OF GRIEF—A SENSE OF LOSS:

There are many known causes of grieving. Any significant change (big or small) in a person's life can cause a sense of loss or a lack of feelings of normalcy. There might be a feeling of depression. However, there is a difference between grieving and depression. Grieving is a natural response to loss; whereas, depression is a mental illness that requires specialized treatment.

The most common causes of grieving (loss) are:

1. Death of a loved one—person, pet, pregnancy
2. Breakup or divorce
3. Loss of stability, health, or job
4. Major small to large life changes (too many to list)
5. Personal illness or injury
6. Loss of personal control caused by manipulation by others
7. Removal of a significant other from the home or personal environment

THE GRIEVING PROCESS:

There is no right or wrong way to grieve as an outward expression of natural and/or significant personal loss. It goes on and on quietly in our minds, filling our moments with memories that are incessant with whatever the moments of better times bring into our consciousness. It can manifest as physical, emotional, and/or psychological disruptions of comfort. Grieving is a personal, natural, and significant process that can last for months to years, varying for everyone. Ruminating of past (or even current) life memories or happenings of loss, as well as the anticipation of upcoming loss, can bring about a manifestation of physical, emotional, and psychological natural responses to loss. Some would say, "It is an experience too painful to fully express in words, too private to share."

In 1969, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross identified five (5) states of grief. More recently, David Kessler added additional stages of grief. As an outcome, the grieving process (in the following order) is now known as:

- **Shock:** A disbelief regarding the news of a loss.
- **Denial:** A numbness and lack of responsiveness to the reality of the loss.
- **Anger:** A directed anger toward another person or blaming oneself.
- **Bargaining:** A bargaining to take away the pain. This can occur at anytime during the grieving process.
- **Depression:** An intense sadness exists with a feeling of emptiness. Withdrawal from normal activities is common.
- **Testing:** An attempt to find ways and means of dealing with the loss. Also, trying to deal with other/additional grieving processes may be present.
- **Acceptance:** The final step does not mean a person feels OK with the loss. However, life for them will go on, and the loss is their new reality. This might include establishing new relationships and reorganizing roles.

The thoughts and emotions of grief can last for months, years, and, yes, even a lifetime. Once a person experiences the pangs of grieving, it becomes easier to relate and empathize with others who must endure the finality of a significant loss—such as a loved one’s death.

As a healthcare provider or a caring person, the observation of the emotional pain of others calls forth the professional and humanistic responsibility to empathize, comfort, and guide behaviors that allow and understand the necessity of the grieving process.

HELPING SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING—A PROCESS NOT AN EVENT!

1. Respect their way(s) of grieving—knowing that the grieving process is individually unique and accomplished over time.
2. Ask, “Is there someone I can call that would provide support?”
3. If grieving is related to death, attend the funeral or other services that recount the importance of the deceased person’s life.
4. Verbally express sorrow for a person’s loss.
5. Provide hope that life will be better in the future and will, again, have meaning. Gently verbally reinforce that the pain of grieving will subside.
6. Listen—let the person talk (or not talk), cry (or not cry). Sit in silence and with compassion as you listen. Offer support and just be there as the situation dictates.
7. Encourage the seeking of additional support from others or support services, if needed.
8. Offer to help with shopping and pet sitting.
9. Verbally confirm that you are there to help and accept helpful offers from others.

IN CLOSING:

Loss of something/anything important, dear, and/or loved can bring pain like no other! A loving, gentle, and supportive person to a grieving person shows

caring and sensitive behavior. In the quiet moments of support, it says, “I, also, feel your pain and I am here for you.”

Therefore, from one human being to another, never dismiss the pain associated with grieving as an outcome of loss. Once a person experiences the personal pain associated with a significant loss, the obvious need to support another person through their significant grieving process is a heartfelt mission. The ongoing loss never totally goes away, it just finds a special place in our hearts and occasionally the door opens to our suppressed memories.

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