

THE PROCESS OF GRIEVING A LOSS



September 2009 :: Fact sheet by Major Denise Milkins, Salvation Army Bridge Program, and Hannah Graham, School of Sociology & Social Work, University of Tasmania.

Grief is the response we have to experiencing a loss of someone or something that we value. Individuals will grieve in their own way, everyone is different.

Grieving a loss is a common emotional journey; it is a life experience that most humans will encounter at some point. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. People from different backgrounds, cultures, ages and genders will express grief in different ways. 'Bereavement' is a word that means grief about losing a loved one, e.g. the death of a family member or friend.

Losses that We can Experience

Loss of a person or relationship:

- Death, suicide, overdose
- Divorce or separation
- Abortion, infertility, stillbirth or miscarriage
- Loss of custody or contact with children or grandchildren
- Loss of contact or rejection by colleagues, unemployment
- Leaving a church or close-knit faith community
- Travel or moving to a new place

Loss of part of self or identity:

- Ill health, cancer, disability, hep C, loss of limb, organ, teeth, hair
- Memory loss, control, freedom, independence, status
- Freedom and personal choice (for example, going to prison)

Loss of something that you value:

- Personal belongings or property
- Money
- Pets
- Mobility, driver's license or transportation (car)
- Natural disaster (bushfires, floods, earthquake, tsunami)

Developmental loss at different stages in life:

- Children growing up ('empty nesters')
- Moving out of home
- After retirement, losing a lot of good friends who are older

Memories can be very special, but also very painful. A good support network is an important part of the grieving and healing process.

If you are experiencing grief, you can be supported by a case worker or a chaplain.

Loss and grief issues can be difficult to face on your own. A chaplain can listen and help you to share the spiritual issues or questions that are important to you in your grieving process.

Who or what is a source of hope for you in difficult times? Who is supporting you?



GRIEF: SOME COMMON INGREDIENTS

Common Feelings

Sadness, shock, anger, guilt, emptiness, anxiety, loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness, relief, yearning, numbness, fear, panic, confusion, doubt, irritability, low self worth, denial, regret, bitterness, frustration, detachment, depression, resentment, unforgiveness, ambivalence.

Common Thoughts

- "Why did this happen to me/us?" or "This is not fair, there is no justice"
- "I'll never get over this" or "Things are never going to be the same"
- "I think I'm going crazy" or "I feel like I'm losing the plot"
- "If only..." or "What if..." or "What is the point of..."
- "I should have done more, it's all my fault" or "It's all his/her fault, if they had just..."

Common Physical Reactions

- Sleep disturbances, dreams and nightmares, flashbacks, insomnia
- Headaches and inability to concentrate or focus, disorientation or forgetting things
- Weight gain or weight loss, abnormal eating patterns
- Empty aching arms or aches and pains in the stomach area
- Hypertension, heart palpitations, asthma, arthritis
- Fatigue, feeling very cold or very hot, having a weakened immune system

Common Behaviours

- Social withdrawal and isolation, moving, loss of interest in normal lifestyle, overworking
- Crying being triggered by memories, shaking, talking to yourself or a lost loved one
- Use of alcohol and other drugs, especially around anniversaries or special events

Want Support or More Info? Useful Grief and Loss Contacts in Tasmania

If you are suicidal or having a mental health related emergency, get help quickly

- Very Urgent: ring 000 for an ambulance. Otherwise, make an emergency appointment with your GP.
- Suicide Call Back Service (Counselling & Prevention): phone 1300 659 467.

If you want to find a professional to talk to, then ring one of the following services:

- Mental Health Services Helpline (24hrs): phone 1800 332 388.
- Kids Helpline (24hrs) (youth): phone 1800 55 1800. Lifeline (24hrs) (adults): phone 13 11 14.
- Mensline Australia (24hrs) (Counselling & Support for Men): phone 1300 789 978.
- Pregnancy Counselling Australia (24hrs) (Miscarriage, Post-abortion Grief): phone 1300 737 732.
- Road Trauma Support Team (Grief over Death or Injury from Road Accident): phone (03) 6348 7252.
- Salvation Army Hope Line (24hrs) (Bereavement after Suicide): phone 1300 467 534.

References

Ashfield, J. (2009) *Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family* BeyondBlue & Peacock Publications: South Australia.

© 2009. Care was taken to ensure this fact sheet is accurate, but please seek professional help if grieving.
Funded by Department of Health & Ageing