

Tip Sheet: Dealing with Loss and Grief

KEY POINTS:

- Understanding loss and grief
- Functions of normal grieving
- Common individual responses to grief
- Supporting a grieving person
- Self-care considerations
- Vitae support service available

LOSS is experienced when someone or something we value is no longer available to us (e.g. death or redundancy).

GRIEF is our total response to the emotional experience of loss.

Types of Loss:

- Actual – can be recognised by self and others
- Perceived – felt by self but not tangible to others
- Situational – experienced as the result of an unpredictable event
- Anticipatory – experienced for a loss yet to take place

Factors affecting the grief response:

- Degree of attachment to the lost
- Meaning of the loss to you
- Circumstances/nature of the loss
- Your socio-cultural resources
- Your personal resources and stressors

Functions of normal grieving

Although each person's grief experience is different there are some common responses experienced by the majority of people. It's important to remember these are normal reactions in a normal person to an abnormal life event.

People experiencing grief are likely to feel and project a range of emotions as they work through the grief process.



Moving forward through the grief process

It's not unusual to struggle, move forward and regress as you 'work' through your grief. Everyone's experience of grief is different and it's important that others don't impose their expectations of grieving on you.

Some of the most important needs a grieving person has are:

- To **feel support**. We need to recognise that loss raises all sorts of feelings and that to cope we need the support and understanding of others.
- To **face reality**. The process of recovery is linked directly to acceptance of the loss. Acceptance will not come until the reality of the loss is faced.
- To **express feelings** (emotional release). Grieving people should be allowed to express their feelings. This might mean talking, tears or other emotional displays.
- To move towards the **re-establishment of self** (adjusting to a new life and on-going living). For many this is difficult and for some time painful and at times unthinkable.

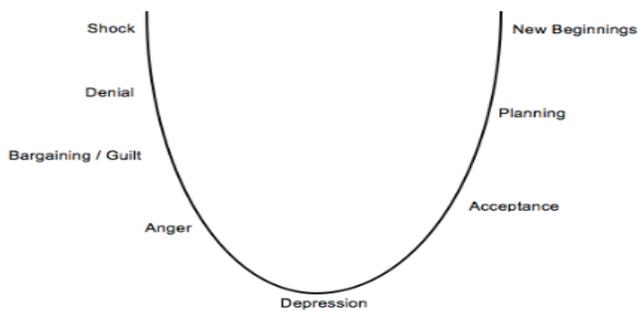
Common individual responses to grief

Some of the normal reactions to grief include:

EMOTIONAL

- Shock
- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Guilt

The Grief and Loss Curve



PHYSICAL

- Sleep disturbances
- Health-related problems

THINKING

- Memories/flashbacks
- Dreams/nightmares
- Confusion and lack of concentration
- Memory problems

BEHAVIOUR

- Social - withdrawal/detachment
- Work – poor motivation/sense of purpose
- Habits
 - increased use of alcohol or other drugs
 - loss or appetite of over-eating
 - loss of interest in enjoyable activities
 - quick emotional changes

Supporting a grieving person – Some DO's and DON'Ts

These are some practical suggestions that may be appropriate in many situations.

1. DO listen and hear what's being said
2. DO acknowledge that each person's experience will be unique and be differently triggered
3. DO remember that nobody has to justify their feelings to you
4. DO realise the person has suffered a loss, even if you don't perceive it as such
5. DO allow the person time to grieve
6. DO encourage the griever to express emotion and to work through their grief

7. DO remember that many who give support immediately after a loss may be delayed in working through their own grief
8. DO recognise the intensity of grief that will be experienced at significant times (e.g. Anniversaries, Christmas)
9. DO encourage those who share a common grief to support one another if they can.
10. DON'T prevent the person from expressing their guilt or anger if they need to.
11. DON'T stifle the person's desire to talk about their loss (or the deceased)
12. DON'T personalise knock-backs to your efforts to assist
13. DON'T give trite answers to the "Why?" question

Self-Care considerations for Supporters

Taking care of others requires you to respect and care for yourself. Physical, psychological and spiritual health are crucial to preserving your personal and professional integrity and wellbeing.

- Consider your own values, beliefs, perceptions and experiences
- Consider your own personal levels of stress

SUMMARY

Be aware. Remember that working through grief is a normal and necessary process

Be there. Learn to be with the person, not to solve their problem.

Be sensitive. Allow the distress and don't try to take it away.

Be human. Allow expression of feeling without judgement

Be ready. Listen when the story is re-told repeatedly.

Be patient. Remember that the process of grieving takes time.

Support service available to you

If you're feeling 'stuck' in your grief and you need some help to make progress, contact Vitae to make an appointment to speak with a counsellor.

Freephone 0508 664 981g