

GRIEF: “THE PAIN OF LOSS”

We “GRIEVE” any loss. The most obvious example is when someone close to us dies. We also painfully grieve *separations* from people, death of a pet, or losing anything precious to us. Losing some aspect of your health can also trigger grief.

There are many **common reactions** when we experience Bereavement or Grief. Each of these can last for days or months, fluctuating in strength.

- ANGER
 - about the senselessness of it all.
 - with the person who has died.
 - towards others for what they did or did not do.
- SADNESS
 - that painful, heavy feeling we have about loss.
 - pining and wishing things were different.
- ANXIETY
 - it is common to have a general feeling of dread, like something else bad is going to happen.
 - many have strong anxieties that they won't cope, feeling vulnerable.
- GUILT
 - it is easy to feel bad about things we said or did not say to the person who has gone.
 - many people think over and over about how they would have done things differently if they could.
 - It is important to *accept* that we all have regrets and we can only now address the things that we can change (not the past).
- CONFUSION -
 - our thinking and concentration is often more clouded so it's hard to have conversations and make decisions – even about basic things like what food to buy or cook.
- SHOCK & UNREALITY
 - feeling “this hasn't really happened” can come and go for a long time.
- DETACHED & NUMB
 - feeling cut off from others, even feeling “dead” or “numb” emotionally; not having the usual range of feelings.
- OVERWHELMED
 - because we feel confused and numb and so many other intense emotions, we can feel powerless and overwhelmed.
 - many people feel not up to everyday activities.
- DESPAIRING & HOPELESS
 - life can feel empty and meaningless for a while
 - it can make us question our own future. These feelings, like others, will reduce and pass.



YEARNINGS & PREOCCUPATION - it is very common to yearn for the person (or thing) we have lost; intensely desiring to have them back in our grasp.
- most people find themselves thinking about the person a lot.

PHYSICAL - it is common to feel sick in the stomach and reduced appetite
- it is often harder to feel refreshed and hard to sleep at night.
- most people also feel low in energy and motivation and can't find their usual enthusiasm.

WHAT TO DO TO COPE WITH GRIEF

There is no standard advice that applies to everyone. That is because different people experience grief in their own way, for as long as it takes.

One way to think about grief is like a river that has to flow it's own course. Your job is to let it flow naturally. Don't try to block the feelings too much – that dams it up, causing problems later. Try to find a way to accept what has happened, otherwise we go round in circles like a whirlpool. **Give yourself permission to honour your sadness.**

Some suggestions that follow might include:



- Label your feelings (eg. anger, resentment, sadness, yearning) and allow yourself to have them.
- Find a healthy way to ventilate or express these feelings (write them in a journal, tell someone, talk to the photo of the person that you are grieving occasionally).
- Set a healthy lifestyle routine as soon as possible, paying attention to diet, exercise and social interaction.
- Talk to people. Let neighbours or workmates know.
- If you want some counselling, a short number of appointments can help you manage your own flow of feelings better. Start by telling your GP what has happened and how you feel. They might recommend a course of action.
- Observe loss anniversaries and other key dates (maybe birthdays) in a planned way. A good example would be to decide how to mark that day in advance and give yourself permission to do that one thing (such as lighting a candle or looking at a photo).

If you want to speak with a clinical psychologist to see if that helps you can call
Basten & Associates, Clinical Psychologists on 9891-1766.
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