

EAP Educates: Grieving – A Healing Process

When a loss is experienced, regardless of how big or small, there is a grieving process that must take place. It is a natural process which has different stages. The end goal is to come to a point of acceptance.

Grief is a healthy response to a traumatic situation. In order to ultimately accept loss, a person has to go through the grieving process. Remember that every stage that you go through is healthy and necessary, unless stagnation happens to occur.

The grief pattern

- Grief can be described as a state or feeling of separation.
- The deeper the sense of loss, the more pronounced will be the feeling and behaviour patterns in the grief cycle.
- Grief affects you emotionally, physically and spiritually.
- There are two types of grief:
 - Acute – from sudden death / unexpected retrenchment etc.
 - Anticipatory – news of a terminal disease / an unwelcome occurrence that you have time to worry about.
- Grief has ebb and flow and unpredictability to it.
- Grief is not a sign of weakness, it is necessary to accept the loss as something that can't be avoided.
- No experience of grief is the same – no two people feel the same way, but we can learn from the way others cope.

There are no short cuts to dealing with grief. You have to live through it to resolve it. Common experiences to grief are to avoid it, to try to get over it quickly, or to try to wait it out if the first two don't work. Avoiding and blocking grief can lead to physical disease and emotional illness.

The grieving process goes through five stages:

These do not follow a specific order, and you will move between the stages as part of your healing process.

Shock and Denial

This is a psychological buffer that protects us from information or feelings we are not yet ready to deal with and accept. Denial is a necessary first step to recovery. It should not last long, and this is not a time for long term decision making. Once the denial and shock goes away, the reality of the situation arrives in the form of pain.

Anger

To be angry about a loss is a natural reaction. Anger with oneself, blaming others, anger against God or others is a normal response. If the anger is not worked through, guilt feelings are increased.

Bargaining

This is a desperate attempt to stay in control, to have things the way we want them. It helps us to avoid the reality we are not yet ready to accept. This is a time when we are bargaining (often with God) to see ways of

easing the pain of getting through certain situations. It is also a time where we think a lot about “if only...” and “what if...” The bargaining phase can also sometimes carry a lot of guilt.

Depression / Despair

Feelings of sorrow are associated with loss. Some depression is a real part of grief. There will be days when you wake up and want to put your pillow over your head not face the day. This is when we spend much time crying and grieving. This is an important process that ultimately results in a kind of acceptance with emotional attachment.

Acceptance

This is the point where coping skills for the future are better and stronger than before the loss. This is a time where we are able to think about a deceased person or the loss we have experienced without an minimal pain. This is when we start looking forward to our future and not focus on the past. We set new goals, new dreams and we have renegotiated our way forward.

How to grieve successfully

1. Nurture yourself.
 - a. Watch what you eat and drink
 - b. Take plenty of exercise, preferably with a friend
 - c. Talk about your loss or lost loved one
 - d. It's OK to be alone
 - e. Keep your normal routine, especially bed time
 - f. Don't be afraid to ask for help
 - g. Allow yourself to have angry feelings
 - h. Check your health with your family doctor
2. Go for bereavement counselling. It's good to have someone to walk with on your journey
3. Build up your support. Often after a few weeks, supportive people disappear. They tell you to call them if you need help. That's often the last thing you want to do. Join a support group, attend EAP, reach out to your church or community for support. On anniversaries and birthdates, invite a friend to lunch or tea or go out for the day. These dates are the hardest to deal with.
4. Writing
 - a. Keep a journal of your grief journey expressing your feelings.
 - b. Write a letter to your grief.
 - c. Write a letter of goodbye to the deceased person.
 - d. Write a letter to God – telling him of your anger and your feelings
5. Set goals. 7 days, 30 days, 90 days, 6 months and 1 year....

LOSS IS NOT THE ENEMY : LIVING IN FEAR OF IT IS.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR CONFIDENTIAL ASSISTANCE, CONTACT YOUR EAP