



Grief: What You Feel You Can Heal

Grief is experienced whenever you lose something important to you. It is so powerful that people sometimes look for ways to go around it rather than through it. This approach will not work. The best thing to do for yourself is work through it and express your feelings. Understanding what you may feel during the grief process can help you heal.

STAGE 1: Shock and Denial

Some people cannot believe what has happened. For most people there is numbness. They don't believe that they really have lost their loved one and they hope to return to normal moods and thoughts. They don't act because they don't really accept the loss.

STAGE 2: Emotional Release

There is a need to vent feelings of anger, sadness, frustration, jealousy and so on. Holding in feelings may lead to physical symptoms or may delay moving on to action. The big question here is: "Why? Why her or him?"

STAGE 3: Depression and Physical Distress

People feel lost and helpless. They doubt their abilities. They may feel hopelessness and show physical signs of stress such as sleeplessness and stomach problems. It is not unusual to have to visit your physician to get some medication to help you sleep or to help your mood. Be willing to do whatever is needed to take care of yourself, medically speaking. Getting a physical exam is a good thing to do to make certain you are in good *physical* health.

STAGE 4: Panic and Guilt

People feel responsible for the loss or death even though they had no control over it. People have trouble thinking clearly and cannot plan effectively. Nothing is done well for a while until they get into the recovery process. Be kind to yourself and understand that you are healing.

STAGE 5: Anger and Hostility

This is an important part of the recovery process. Anger can be positive, but may be projected onto those around you. Try to use these feelings to gain the energy needed to cope with the situation. If you are getting feedback from others that you are angry often, you will need to work on your grief issues so that you do not alienate the people who are trying to help you.

STAGE 6: Renewed Hope and Rebuilding

This is the time to plan for a new life without the person in your life. People are able to take constructive action toward obtaining new goals and coping after the loss.

STAGE 7: Resolution

People start to feel in control of their lives again. The loss is still a part of their lives but does not dictate their actions.



Tips for Coping with Grief

- ▶ **Allow yourself to grieve.** “The only way round is through,” according to Robert Frost. Coping with death is vital to your mental health. It is only natural to experience grief when a loved one dies. There are many ways to cope effectively with your pain. Acknowledging your feelings and expressing them in a healthy way is vital toward healing. It’s easy to get stuck on the shock of it all, and it’s easy to reject the negative emotions associated with a loss, but the only way to deal with grief is to go through it, which means allowing yourself to experience the associated emotions rather than suppressing them.

It’s hard to imagine how life goes on after the loss of a loved one, but it does. You can get caught up in the whirlwind of day to day without really acknowledging that your stress levels have increased significantly and you’re not letting yourself grieve adequately. The emotions will come out one way or another, so it’s best to manage them on your terms and work through the process of grieving in a healthy, productive way. Talk to others, write in a journal, cry. There are many ways to express your emotions, so make sure that you do it.

- ▶ **Draw closer to loved ones.** Rather than isolating yourself and your emotions, it’s good to talk with people who care about you and might know the deceased themselves. You can share stories that make you laugh and remind you why you loved that person. It is easy to feel burdensome and needy in times like this, but people who care about you want you to lean on them. Take advantage of the people in your life willing to share in your hard times with you, including friends, family, religious leaders, and counselors.
- ▶ **Take care of your health.** Maintain regular contact with your family physician and be sure to eat well and get plenty of rest. Be aware of the danger of developing a dependence on alcohol or medication to deal with your grief. It’s easy to forsake your own needs when you’re grieving, but taking care of your emotions includes taking care of your body, too.

Regular exercise releases endorphins that will allow you to experience positive emotions in spite of your grief, which can help you stay balanced. Make sure you’re eating properly as well. Fuel your body with protein, whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

- ▶ **Call your EAP.** Your Employee Assistance Program is a company-sponsored benefit that is free and completely confidential. If you are struggling to cope with the loss of a loved one, contact BHS at 800-245-1150. Your Care Coordinator will talk with you about options for support.



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