

Grief: The Reaction to Loss.....

Grief...

- ... is a natural and normal reaction to loss.
- ... produces physical and emotional responses.
- ... is the most universal of all human experiences and also the most painful.

No two people will experience a loss in exactly the same way. Your grief will be as individual as your fingerprint. No one can tell you how to grieve. There is no formula for how much a loss will hurt or how long grief will last, so do not compare yourself to others in similar situations.

Although everyone experiences grief in different ways, there are common patterns and feelings that most individuals will share. Allow yourself to feel these normal emotions so that you can get through the grief and go on with life. It is important to understand what some normal reactions might be. This will make your behavior more predictable and less frightening to experience. Knowledge of the process of grief will help you to have a better sense of control over your reactions to loss.

Your grief will be different depending on the circumstances of death and your coping strategies. A sudden death, an accident, a suicide, or an untimely death may complicate your mourning. If you face a change of environment or a loss of financial security as a consequence of death, this can complicate your grief.

The kind of relationship you had with the deceased is very important to the intensity of your grief. The closer your emotional attachment is to the deceased, the greater your potential for having a strong grief reaction. It might be said that grief is the price you pay for love. Your age, sex, religious beliefs and previous experience with death will all influence your grief. In short, no one can predict how you will experience grief.

Certain reactions to death are so common that almost everyone experiences them. The period of shock is not long. If the death was unexpected, you may find yourself denying at first that the person has died. This response is nature's way of insulating you from what is happening. Another immediate reaction to a death is anger. Most of us were taught as children to avoid anger. Therefore you may feel guilty when your anger will not go away. You may also feel guilty for any number of reasons. It is common to feel guilty for even being alive.

Depression is probably the hardest part of grief. You may be flooded with despair and feel as if it will never get better. Please try to remember that it does. The anguish occurs when you realize the full impact and the meaning of your loss. The periods of very intense longing and sorrow will diminish with time.

You will not move from one mood to another in some kind of sequence. You will probably have many feelings all at once. Sometimes people become concerned they are getting worse as time progresses rather than better. You may feel worse in six months than you expected you would. Do not set expectations for yourself by the calendar. Take one step at a time, one hour at a time, and one day at a time.

As time goes on and you allow yourself to feel the pain of loss, your grief will diminish. You will not always feel the way you do now. This does not mean you will forget your loved one; it means you accept their death and are coping with life without them. Even though your relationship with your loved one has changed forever, its existence and your feelings live on forever.

LOSS is being without something of value that we had or thought we had.

GRIEF is our response to loss; we grieve anything in which we have invested time, effort, thought, money or affection. There are different intensities of grief, which relate to the value and personal investment we have in what we lost.

PHYSICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF GRIEF

1. It is usually characterized by an immediate and overwhelming sense of generalized discomfort. This discomfort may show up in one or more of the organic systems of an individual.
2. Muscular system may feel weak as if the individual's strength were drained. You may be unable to get muscles to function as desired, this can show up as tremors or tension.
3. The glandular system may be activated, different sets of glands working in different ways.
4. In acute grief, persons tend to be more vulnerable to infections and viral illnesses.
5. The cardiovascular system may react with high blood pressure, rapid heart action, changes in body temperature, with alternating cold chills and heat flashes.
6. The gastrointestinal system may experience malfunctions, with difficulty in swallowing, loss of appetite, indigestion or diarrhea or constipation.
7. The skin may react with heightened sensitivity, various forms of irritation, either immediately or over a longer period of time. In some cases boils or shingles

Variations depend upon the person's unique manner of response to emotional stress. Fortunately not every person will have all of the above, but any of these can well be within the norm of grief responses. A visit to the doctor is important to rule out any serious illness. Tell the doctor that you are in the midst of grief.

STRESS INDICATORS

Please rate the following with the scale given below. None of these indicators are necessarily signs of excessive stress, but stress can be an important component of each of them. You will have to make your own decision about which of the indicators are signs of too much stress for you. If you rate yourself in the “often” category on a number of these indicators, you may be experiencing excessive stress.

Because the death of a loved one is the cause of great stress, it is important that you recognize your indicators and work toward relieving some of your stress. If you are alarmed by the number of indicators that you have rated as “often” or “very often,” you may want to get the advice of a physician concerning the physical problems and a counselor about the role of stress in your life.

0 = NEVER 1= SELDOM 2=OCCASIONALLY 3=OFTEN 4=VERY OFTEN

Physical Indicators

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headache | <input type="checkbox"/> Cardiovascular Problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arthritis | <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neck Pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Back Pain |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jaw Pain | <input type="checkbox"/> High Blood Pressure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Allergies | <input type="checkbox"/> Asthma |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stomach Cramps | <input type="checkbox"/> Constipation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diarrhea | <input type="checkbox"/> Viral Infections |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue | <input type="checkbox"/> Overeating |

Emotional

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nervousness | <input type="checkbox"/> Anger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hostility | <input type="checkbox"/> Phobias |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Depression | <input type="checkbox"/> Low self-confidence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low self-worth | <input type="checkbox"/> Boredom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apathy | <input type="checkbox"/> Annoy Easily |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hypersensitivity | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor Concentration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor memory | |

Behavioral

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drug Abuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol Abuse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor Relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor Performance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep Problems | <input type="checkbox"/> (School/Work) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compulsive Thoughts | <input type="checkbox"/> Eating Problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nervous Fidgeting | |

RECOGNIZING STRESS

If you have suffered the loss of someone close to you, how you might feel and why you might feel that way are important things to think about. You need to be concerned about yourself. Your life is changed. The challenge is to gradually accept this change and move your own life forward.

First, you must recognize that death is a stress-producing event. “Stress” can be defined as a mentally or emotionally upsetting state. If you look at the following list of stressful events, you will see that death holds a high position, and that eight of the first ten events are related to a person’s loss. Take a minute to add up the numbers on the scale that are next to events that have happened to you in the last two years.

Life Change Index

Events	Scale of Impact
Death of Spouse or Child.....	100
Divorce.....	73
Marital Separation	65
Jail Term.....	63
Death of Close Family Member.....	63
Personal Injury or Illness	53
Victim of a Crime.....	50
Marriage	50
Fired From a Job	47
Marital Reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Change in Health of Family Member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sex Difficulties	39
Gain of New Family Member	39
Business Readjustment	39
Change in Financial State	39
Spouse (arguments) increase in Arguments	35
Mortgage over \$50,000	31
Foreclosure of Mortgage or Loan	30
Change of Responsibilities at Work	29
Son or Daughter Leaving Home	29
Trouble with In-laws	29
Outstanding Personal Achievement	28
Spouse Begins or Stops Work	26
Begin or End School	26
Change in Living Conditions	25
Revision of Personal Habits	24
Trouble with Boss	23
Change in Work Hours or Conditions	20
Change in Residence	20
Change in Schools	20
Change in Recreation	19

Change in Church Activities	19
Change in Social Activities	18
Mortgage or Loan Less Than \$50,000	17
Change in Sleeping Habits	16
Change in Number of Family Get-Togethers	15
Change in Eating Habits	13
Vacation	12
Minor Violations of the Law	11

If your total on the Scale of Impact is more than 300, your stress level is very high. You are likely to have emotional distress and may experience depression or physical illness. By recognizing the degree that stress can affect you, you will be able to protect yourself from other kinds of stress and practice stress management.

MEDITATION VERSUS MUSCLE RELAXATION

Although meditation and progressive deep muscle relaxation appear to accomplish similar states of relaxation, people sometimes have different reactions to the two techniques. Some find one technique easier or more productive than the other. In a way, the relaxation that both techniques produce is a kind of conditioned response that people learn to produce while they sit quietly. For some, meditation is easier because it does not involve muscle tensing and releasing. These people tend to achieve the relaxed state more easily through their minds. People who have difficulty with meditation or who have tension in a specific muscle area often prefer muscle relaxation. One advantage of deep muscle relaxation is that the conditioned response can be paired with a cue and used actively in particular stress situations.

LEARNING PROGRESSIVE DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION

Before you learn how to practice the technique, a word or warning needs to be expressed. Watch out for any muscles, joint, or other physical problems that might be negatively affected by the tensing of a particular muscle group. If you need to, skip a muscle group. As you are going through the procedure of tensing and relaxing muscles, remember the following:

1. Keep your eyes closed.
2. Sit or lie in a comfortable position (the instructions for muscle tensing and relaxing are for a sitting position, but they can be modified for using the technique in a prone position.)
3. Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
4. Find a place where you won't be disturbed.
5. Try to concentrate on the difference between tension and relaxation.
6. Imagine that tension is flowing out of your body.
7. Take deep, relaxing breaths, try to breathe from you abdomen.

You may want someone to read over the instructions for tensing and relaxing to you the first time you try it, or you can record the instructions yourself and then listen to the tape. Commercially recorded tapes also are available at many bookstores. Most people report better initial results if they listen to the instructions; however, remember that your ultimate goal is to be able to produce the conditioned relaxation response yourself.

For each muscle group mentioned, you are to tighten a muscle, hold it five to fifteen seconds, and then slowly relax that muscle group. Repeat each muscle group at least once, more if that is a particularly tense area for you. Set your own pace, but relax for at least five seconds before you move on to the next muscle tensing. After you have practiced regularly for a week or so, you may be able to use the abbreviated set of exercises and eventually, as you develop the condition relaxation response, you may use only one or two muscle-tightening procedures to achieve a relaxed state.

Deep Muscle Relaxation

General Directions

Sit back quietly, relax, and breathe deeply. Begin to imagine that all the tension is slowly going out of your body. As you go through the progressive deep muscle relaxation you will feel more relaxed each time you tighten and relax a specific muscle group. In order to develop a conditioned response, say the word “relax” to yourself every time you relax a muscle group. Keep your eyes closed and try to screen out any external noises or distractions. Begin with the muscles in your arms and shoulders.

Arms and Shoulders

1. Put your arms out in front of you and clenching both fists (keep the muscles tensed for five to fifteen seconds.) Note tension in your forearm and hand. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
2. Now, put your arms in front of you with palms up and bring your fingers up until you touch your shoulders. Notice the tension in you biceps and upper arms. Now relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
3. Straighten and stretch out your arms with your fingers spread out and forward as far as possible. Note the tension in your upper arm and fingers. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat. (Remember to breathe deeply and notice how your body is getting more and more relaxed.)

Face, Neck and Shoulders

4. Wrinkle your forehead. Note the tension around your eyes, temples and forehead. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
5. Close your eyes tightly. Note the tension around your eyes and temples. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
6. Press your tongue up on the roof of your mouth. Note tension in your mouth and jaw area. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
7. Press your lips together tightly. Notice tension in the mouth and lower jaw. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
8. Press your head back until you feel tension in your neck and shoulders. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
9. Push your head forward, moving your chin down toward your chest until you feel tension in your throat and neck. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
10. Shrug up your shoulders. Raise them until you feel tension in the shoulders and neck. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat. (Remember to breathe deeply and notice that you are becoming more relaxed.)

Chest, Stomach and Lower Back

11. Arch your back, move away from your chair, and push your elbows back. Note the tension all along your spine. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
12. Take a deep breath and hold it. Notice the tension in your chest and stomach. Relax and exhale slowly. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
13. Suck in your stomach and try to make it reach your spine. Notice the tension in your stomach and lower back. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
14. Push your stomach out. Note the tension in your stomach and along your sides. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat. (Remember to breathe deeply and notice how you are becoming very, very, relaxed.)

Hips, Thighs, Legs and Feet

15. Tense your buttocks by lifting up. Note the tension in your buttocks, back, and upper legs. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
16. Straighten your legs out so that your knees are stiff, your legs are up off the chair, and your toes are pointing toward you. Note tension in your legs, calves, ankles, and knees. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
17. Straighten your legs out so that your knees are stiff, your legs are up off the chair, and your toes are pointing toward you. Note the tension in your legs, calves, ankles, and knees. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat. (Keep breathing easily and deeply. You are becoming more and more relaxed.)

Note: After you complete the muscle relaxation, take some time to enjoy the relaxed state. You may want to use a visualization to further deepen your relaxation.

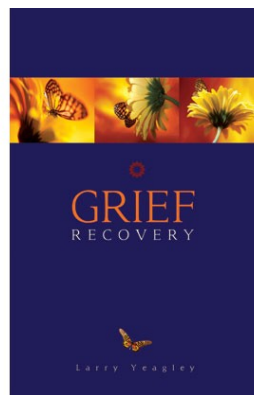
HOW CAN I LEARN TO MANAGE THE LOSS

Share your feelings with others: Relate your problems and memories to those who will listen. Do not hesitate to repeat these time and again. Revealing your thoughts openly helps to alleviate emotional pain.

Establish goals for yourself: Concentrating on service to others and developing new interests will relieve your loneliness and give a new purpose to your life. You may volunteer to serve in a charitable organization or help individuals in need. Consider seeking further education, increasing your involvement in work, and joining service or travel clubs as ways of adding new meaning to your life.

Maintain hope: Paint a realistic picture of what pain you may face. The “grief work” will help you to overcome the intensified pressures of grief. Eventually you will remember the good times, and the bad ones will fade. Remember, when death comes...part of the deceased lives on with the survivor.

Resource: Grief Recovery by Larry Yeagley, available at AdventSource.org



Catholic Grief Recovery Series: A Grief Recovery Group is for individuals who have experienced loss through the death of a loved one. The goal of this group is to provide a process for healing within a safe and supportive environment. The group meets weekly for six weeks, is scripturally based and confidential. For details on upcoming series, you may contact Lori Becker at Office of Christian Service, 989-797-6652 or lbecker@dioceseofsaginaw.org