



The Mulberry Report

Solutions For Life

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Living With Grief

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“It’s been five weeks since your husband passed away. It’s time you got over it and moved on with your life.”

Statements like this, often coming from well-intentioned friends or family, do not accurately reflect the reality of grief. In observing what might be considered normal grief, two things become apparent: First, anyone who lives and, especially, if they dare to love, will experience loss that leads to grief. And second, everyone who grieves, does so in his own unique way at his own pace. There is no cut and dry schedule for recovery. While a person can generally be expected to experience some emotional healing after about six months, everyone has his own timetable for moving through the process. Grieving does not follow a stable, step-by-step progression in a predictable, sequential way from one level to another. Rather it is more likely to involve moving back and forth between two conditions, or experiencing several of them simultaneously. While some people seem to quickly re-enter an almost normal way of life, it may take others years to begin to function in a normal way.

Because the list of normal grief reactions is so extensive and varied, these responses can be described under four general categories: feelings, physical sensations, cognitions, and behaviors.

1. Feelings may include sadness, anger, guilt and self-reproach, anxiety, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, shock, yearning, numbness and relief.
2. Physical sensations can involve weakness, lack of energy, dry mouth, a “hollowness” in the stomach, tightness in the chest or throat, oversensitivity to noise, or breathlessness.
3. Cognitions may include disbelief (especially in the early stages of grieving), confusion and difficulty concentrating, preoccupation, dreams of the deceased, a sense of his presence, and experiences that seem like hallucinations.
4. Behaviors may include sleep disturbance, appetite changes, absent-mindedness, social withdrawal, avoiding reminders of the deceased, searching and calling out, sighing, restless over-activity, crying, and treasuring objects that belonged to the deceased.

While everyone grieves in his own way, one fact remains true for everyone: You cannot walk around the perimeter of loss; you must go through the center, through grief’s core, in order to continue your own life in a meaningful way. After one sustains a loss there are certain tasks that must be accomplished for the process to be completed.

1. To accept the reality of the loss. It is normal when faced with the experience of a

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"I've learned that no matter what happens, or how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow."

- Maya Angelou

References

Therese A. Rando, Ph.D. [How To Go On Living When Someone You Loves Dies.](#)

Carol Staudacher. [Beyond Grief. A Guide For Recovering From The Death Of A Loved One.](#)

J. William Worden. [Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy.](#)

death for a person to react with shock, disbelief and denial. Coming to an acceptance of the reality of the loss takes time since it involves not only an intellectual acceptance but an emotional one.

2. To work through the pain of grief. It is necessary for the bereaved person to feel and go through the pain of grief in order to get the grief work done. Anything that continually allows the person to avoid or suppress this pain can be expected to prolong the course to healing.
3. To adjust to the environment in which the deceased is missing. This statement means different things to different people, depending on what the relationship was with the deceased, and the various roles the deceased played. Not adapting to the loss means that people work against themselves by promoting their own helplessness, by not developing the skills they need to cope or by withdrawing from the world and not facing up to life requirements.
4. To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life. This does not mean that the bereaved should forget about the deceased, but that they find an appropriate place for the dead in their emotional lives – a place that will enable them to go on living effectively in the world.

In conclusion, here are some thoughts on activities that can help in the grief process.

1. The wake and funeral – while exhausting and emotionally draining, these events can be helpful because they bring in the support of friends and community, and give you an opportunity for a last, loving tribute, a public declaration of love.
2. Accept the grief. Do not try to be “brave.” Allow yourself to cry.
3. Talk about it. Share your grief within the family. Do not attempt to protect them by silence. Find a friend to talk with, someone who will listen without passing judgment. If possible find someone, or a group, who has experienced a similar sorrow.
4. Take care of yourself. Eat well; exercise regularly; and get adequate sleep.
5. Develop a memorial. It's best to find your own way to memorialize your loved one. Some plant a tree or develop a memorial garden. Others take flowers to the cemetery regularly. Some light a candle at the dinner table on holidays.
6. Record your thoughts in a journal.
7. Turn grief into creative energy. If circumstances allow, find a way to help others. Keep busy – but allow yourself quiet time also.
8. Accept your understanding of the death. Deal with any anger or guilt.

Many people dread certain up-coming events: holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, etc. It is at these times especially that you will want to use as much support and coping skills as you can muster.

You may find it difficult to believe that the majority of people who experience loss are eventually able to say, “Even though it will never be the same, it is going to be O.K.”

Elmer Wannemuehler, LCSW, LMFT, began his clinical social work career at St. Mary's Hospital prior to joining the Mulberry Center practice group in 2003. His clinical practice areas include individual and marital counseling in addition to facilitating anger management groups. His professional career spans 29 years of clinical practice.