

Stages of Grief

1. **Denial** (this isn't happening to me!)
2. **Anger** (why is this happening to me?)
3. **Bargaining** (I promise I'll be a better person if....)
4. **Depression** (I don't care anymore.)
5. **Acceptance** (I'm ready for whatever comes)

****Grief** can be very complex. A better way of viewing it may be that we go through a series of emotions and functions during this process that are not necessarily sequential or that don't follow a specific timeline. Grief also has been described in terms of 3 behaviors exhibited by those suffering from grief and loss. They are:

1. Numbness (mechanical functioning and social insulation)
2. Disorganization (intensely painful feelings of loss)
3. Reorganization (re-entry into a more 'normal' social life)

Although it would be easier to say that grief occurs in this predictable, typical way, it does not. Grief is as individual as the person experiencing it.

How Grief May Be Expressed or How It May Feel (not all encompassing)

- Numbness
- Emptiness
- Physical changes (i.e., trembling, nausea, trouble breathing, muscle weakness, dry mouth or trouble sleeping and eating)
- Sorrow
- Anger (at a situation, person, or nothing in particular)
- Guilt (i.e., "I could have," "I should have," or "I wish I would have")
- Strange dreams or nightmares
- Absent-mindedness
- Social withdrawal
- Lack of a desire to return to work

How to Help (taken from www.treehouse-bcw.org)

(Please note that the support you provide will vary depending on our closeness to the individual who is grieving.)

LISTEN: Avoid the impulse to provide trite, "shut-down" responses such as "It's OK" or "Don't cry" because it's *not* ok, and those grieving should cry to express their sadness. Hear the anger, questions pain, disbelief, guilt, or whatever they are experiencing. Often individuals need to talk about the circumstances of the death over and over again. You can encourage them to talk about it gently by saying, "Can you tell me about it?"

BE DIRECT and HONEST: Don't be afraid to share your own feelings. ("I wish I knew what to say" "I miss _____ so much). Show emotions yourself. You will not make

the person who is grieving feel worse, and, in fact, you may find that it generates closeness and mutual com

ASK QUESTIONS and more importantly, make yourself available: Ask to hear stories about the deceased; favorite times spent together, regrets, funny memories, etc.

PROVIDE SUGGESTIONS for outlets: Journal writing, letter writing to the deceased, reading books, music artwork.

ALLOW HUMOR and **LIGHTNESS**: It is important to laugh and spend time with friends, even though this may feel awkward at times. Nevertheless, allow for both when appropriate.

ALLOW ADULTS TO LEARN THEIR OWN COPING TECHNIQUES: Remember to allow for different understandings of and reactions to grief and loss.

PROMOTE WELLNESS: Mot people can manage their r own reactions best if they get rest, good food, exercise, and have access to people who can listen, who can tolerate their pain without trying to make it go way prematurely, and don't criticize their coping techniques.

ALLOW FOR SLOW ABSORBTION OF LOSS: Grief, especially in relation to a traumatic event, takes time to adjust to. Adults need to be allowed to absorb the range of losses that it can cause slowly and in their own way.

ENSURE SELF-AWARENESS REGARDING PERSONL ISSUES WITH TRAUMA: Try to be aware of and process your own issues so you don't prejudge what is emotionally real and conceptually true for others.

TOLERATE OTHERS' PAIN: Staying present to and accepting of the depth and range of pain that is there, rather than ignoring, or trying to talk or wish it away.

BE THE LEARNER: Let them guide you towards their own ways of expressing and help them teach you about what is going on inside them.

PATIENCE: Encourage then to tell the same stories again and again until they don't need to anymore.... at least for now.

STAY ALERT AND FLEXIBLE: Stay alert and serendipitous, opportune times for listening, commenting, offering a quiet presence, and intervening.

TRUST THEIR FEELINGS: Be willing to surf with the range of emotions and behaviors they present... from huge and roiling to a need for solitude or a quiet presence. Remember that your job is not to help them "to get over it" or "around it" but to honor their journey "through" trauma and grief as they find their own style and pace in the direction of hope and healing.

More Practical Ideas On How to Help

1. Listen, laugh, and cry.
2. Send notes, cards, emails or phone messages. Let them know, "I'm thinking of you." It continues to help even long after the death.
3. Try to anticipate one's needs. Bereaved persons sometimes don't know what to ask for or are unaware of what helps. After a traumatic loss, one is typically numb, in shock or disoriented for a varying period of time.
4. Nighttime can be particularly tough (getting to sleep, staying asleep, not wanting to wake up). If you are available, give the loved one or friend permission to call.
5. Stick close, defend their right to grieve, and be present even if you don't understand.
6. Give them permission to mourn in front of you. "I'm here for you and have nothing more important right now."
7. Invite them to attend events, to lunch, to the movies, or to an exercise class with you, as you would normally do. They'll decide if they cannot; accept their decision without debate. Don't hesitate to wait some time and then ask again if your first, second, or even third invitation is declined.
8. Be mindful of holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries.
9. Don't try to find magic words to take the pain away. There are none. A simple, "I'm sorry" is adequate enough to offer support.
10. Avoid saying, "I know how you feel" because no one does. An alternative "I can't imagine what you are going through. Know that I am here for you."
11. Avoid saying, "It was God's will" or "At least you have other children," something positive about the loss or any other similar sayings. These statements only serve to minimize the loss. No words will make the loss "all right."
12. Avoid judgments of behaviors or emotions. Saying "you should or shouldn't" is not helpful. Decisions and behaviors related to displaying/removing photographs, reliving the death, idealizing the child, or expressing anger, depression, or guilt may appear extreme at times – this is normal, even years after the death.
13. For parents with religious convictions, a child's death could raise serious questions about their beliefs. Rather than offer answers, it is best to listen and allow others to explore their own feelings and beliefs to arrive at their own conclusions.
14. Run errands, help with household duties, or whatever way is needed. Don't say, "Call with whatever you need." They will probably never call. Instead, be aware of what needs to be done and offer to do something specific.
15. Saying things like "I remember when..." or "He/she had a wonderful gift for..." can be comforting so that those grieving know that loved ones they have lost are appreciated and remembered. Using the deceased's name is helpful.
16. Encourage those who are grieving to be patient with themselves, and to give themselves permission to grieve for as long as they need to. There is no timetable.

Resources:

www.cancersurvivors.org

www.grieve.info/grieving

www.compassionatefriends.org

On Death and Dying by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

Stuck for Words: What to Say to Someone Who is Grieving by Doris Zagdanski

Surviving Grief and Learning to Live Again by Catherine M. Sanders