

COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

Grief is a normal and expected response to death or to the loss of any significant relationship. It is the process that helps us adapt to the changes that come with loss. Grief is an intense, personal and individual process; a healthy, but painful, human response.

Grief Reactions

The emotional pain of grief can seem so overwhelming and unusual that people will fear that they are going crazy or losing their minds. Grief reactions are extremely varied and usually include periods of shock and denial, depression, anger, guilt, loneliness, anxiety, and glimmers of hope. The intensity of these emotional reactions, as well as behavioral and physical reactions, can vary from mild to incapacitating. In a sense, normal grief is not normal at all.

Each person's pattern of grieving is unique. There is no one "successful" way to grieve. Although there are identifiable reactions that occur following loss, the stages of grieving are not specific steps. They vary according to individual diversity and circumstances.

How Long?

A common question is: how long should grief last? Very simply, grief should last as long as necessary. Many people who have not experienced significant loss often believe that the length of time for grieving is much shorter than what is in fact necessary. The length of grief depends upon many factors including the nature and quality of the lost relationship, prior experiences with loss or death, and if there were any unfortunate factors such as an avoidable accident.

Ways of Coping

People cope in extraordinarily diverse ways. When differing strategies are examined, the one commonality that frequently emerges is seeking the support of family and friends. Practical and emotional support of caring people in the days and months following a loss is enormously helpful. A professional counsellor can help to sort out feelings, understand reactions, and plan for the future. For religiously involved individuals, the support of a minister,

priest or rabbi is also valuable. A structured support group can also provide a haven of comfort and guidance. Support groups allow grieving individuals to interact with others who have had similar experiences and who understand and accept them.

Tips to Assist You Through the Grief Process:

- Take enough time. It is difficult to estimate a “normal” grieving period. It may take longer than you expect, so be patient with yourself.
- Express your feelings. Allow yourself to feel sadness, anger and any other emotions you are experiencing.
- Take care of your physical health through regular exercise and a healthy diet.
- Plan to keep busy during days that remind you of your loss (e.g. birthdays, holidays, and weekends). Spend this time with supportive and caring people.
- Practice relaxation exercises.
- Reach out for help. Let others know when you need companionship and support. Meeting with a counsellor can be helpful at any time through the grieving process. Your EAP service provider can assist you.

**Family Services offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP call:
1-800-668-9920**