

MANAGING GRIEF & LOSS

GRIEF AND LOSS - FACTSHEET

FACING LOSS

Serious loss is something that most people face at some stage in their lives. It may be the death of someone close, or the loss of something important such our health, home, job or marriage. Everyone has a unique experience of loss depending on the relationship they had with the person or thing they have lost, the circumstances surrounding their loss, their background and culture, and the supports that they have in place to help them cope. Even though dealing with loss can be very difficult and painful, some people are also able to experience it as a process of personal growth.



BEREAVEMENT AND MOURNING

- Bereavement is the period of time after loss in which grief is experienced and mourning occurs. The time this takes is very individual. It depends on the loss and the impact on an individual. It often involves grieving for dreams and wishes for the future that have also been lost.
- Mourning is the process by which people learn to adapt to the loss. It is influenced by social customs, and public and private rituals around grieving.

GRIEF AND GRIEVING

Grief is the natural process of reacting to a loss, and impacts us in many ways:

- Mental - grief can change the way that we think, for example by having constant thoughts of loss or loved one, blaming of self or others, or increased sense of gratitude and purpose.
- Physical - grief can impact sleeping, appetite, concentration, energy levels, and even illness.
- Social - connections may be impacted by changes in social roles, and changes in feelings and connection towards other people, whether by feeling closer or more distant.
- Emotional - people experience many intense emotions during grief including anger, guilt, sadness, despair, and love.

Grief is individual and personal, and there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to grieve. It is important to respect the way that others grieve and understand that some will show their grief more than others.

STAGES OF GRIEF (KUBLER ROSS, 1969)

The five stages of grief are often used to make sense of the range of emotions and experiences that come with grief.

It is important to remember that people don't generally progress neatly from one stage to the next, go through them all, or experience them in the same order. They may flip between them in minutes, or stay in one for weeks. They can, however, be a useful tool to help identify and understand different aspects of grief.

- Denial - refusing to accept reality. "This can't be happening."
- Anger - blaming someone or something. "How dare they go/die/let this happen."
- Bargaining - a sense of guilt and responsibility. "If only we had got help sooner."
- Depression - feelings of sadness about the new future. "How can I go on without them?"
- Acceptance - adjusting to a new reality and the role we have in it. "One step in front of another."

ACUTE, INTEGRATED AND COMPLICATED GRIEF

Acute grief is immediate and often intense experience of grief, especially if the loss is unexpected.

Integrated grief is when the experience of loss is incorporated into ongoing life through rituals and memories. These may be pleasant, or sometimes painful especially around important occasions like birthdays and anniversaries, but you are mostly able to cope and progress.

Complicated grief is when the intensity of acute grief seems to be prolonged and does not resolve. Life feels unmanageable and you struggle to cope constantly. If you are experiencing complicated grief you may need to seek professional help.

THINGS THAT CAN HELP

Try to forgive others for difficult issues that you have experienced around the loss. This does not mean that the other person was right, and it does mean not holding on to your resentment.

Connecting with others, sharing memories, and developing small rituals that acknowledge the role of a person that you have lost may help. Use the opportunity to be kind to yourself, and reflect on what is important to you in your own life.

SUMMARY

Grief and loss are a normal part of life and impact on your physical and mental health and your engagement with work, life and the people around you.

Engage with strategies that help you remember and respect your loss, and also help you move forward. Reach out and seek help from friends, family or professionals if you need to.

Managing and coping with grief and loss is an essential part of life. For more grief and loss management strategies, contact the EAP line for assistance on:

1300 878 379

