GRIEF: A PART OF EVERYONE’S LIFE

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“I am grieving.”

HOW TO RESPOND AND WAYS TO SUPPORT SOMEONE
I am not an expert. Who is?
Types of Loss

- death of a loved one
- separation or divorce in a family
- romantic breakup
- abandonment by a parent
- family member with Alzheimer's disease
- sibling with special needs
- family member with a chronic illness
- incarceration of a family member
- living with someone addicted
- homelessness

- military loss
- living with someone with mental illness
- loss of pet
- loss of home
- loss of friends
- loss of personal property
- moving
- graduation
- being bullied
- witnessing a traumatic event
Definitions

**GRIEF** is the intense emotional suffering people experience, resulting from the loss of a loved one. **MOURNING** is the act of expressing this grief and can include verbal expression (crying, talking, yelling) and physical release such as working or writing. **BEREAVED** person is someone who is suffering from grief and mourning.

Grief will take control of you whether you pay attention to it or not. Mourning is your intentional time expressing your grief.
Definitions

**DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF** is grief that a person experiences when they incur a loss that cannot be openly acknowledged, socially supported or publicly mourned. The relationship is not recognized, the loss in not recognized, and the griever is not recognized.

**ANTICIPATORY GRIEF** refers to a grief reaction that occurs before an impending loss. Typically, the impending loss is a death of someone close due to illness but it can also be experienced by dying individuals themselves.
Personal Loss History

What was the first loss you can remember?
How old were you?
What feelings do you remember having then?
What was the first death/funeral you experienced?
How old were you?
What do you remember most about that experience?
What was the most recent loss you experienced (person, time, circumstances, any details)?
How did you cope with this loss?
What was the most difficult loss you have experienced?
Why was this particular loss so difficult?
What is your primary coping skill that you find beneficial?
How have your coping strategies changed over time?
How do you know when your grief is resolved?
How do you recognize when you are feeling emotionally exhausted?
Who can you talk with if you start to feel this way?
What have you learned from this personal loss history?
## Differentiating between Grief and Depression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Grief Reactions</th>
<th>Clinical Depression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transient physical complaints</td>
<td>Chronic physical complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often openly angry</td>
<td>Irritable and complains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of sadness and emptiness</td>
<td>Sense of hopelessness and chronic emptiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates depressed feelings to loss</td>
<td>Does not relate depressed feelings to life event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can experience enjoyment</td>
<td>Pervading sense of doom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt over aspects of loss</td>
<td>Generalized guilt feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary impact on self-esteem</td>
<td>Deep loss of self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds to comfort and support</td>
<td>Does not accept support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Differentiating between Grief and Trauma

Complicating factors:

- In grief, the pain is related to the loss.
- In traumatic grief, the pain is related to the terror of the event.
- Traumatic grief, the loss is the event and the thought of the decease may be a traumatic trigger.
- Trauma first, grief second.

1. Turn the traumatic event into a bad memory (decrease intensity)
2. With trauma, the adaptive coping capacity is assaulted
3. The assumptive world is shaken
4. Normal reaction to abnormal circumstances
Uniqueness of Anticipatory Grief

Complicating factors with lengthy illness:
- Periods of remission/relapse
- Difficult to predict future, hard to prepare
- Spread so thin with responsibilities
- Depletion of social supports, finances, and time
- Difficult treatments and side effects
- Difficult decisions to make, weighing all the factors
- Difficult to watch painful suffering, loss of functioning
Clinical Indicators of Complicated Mourning (Rando)

- Pattern of overreaction to entailing loss and separation
- Frenetic activity to avoid repressed or suppressed material
- Unusually high death anxiety regarding self and/or loved ones
- Over idealization of deceased
- Compulsive, ritualistic behavior that interfere with functioning
- Preoccupation with deceased and issues of loss
- Inability to experience range of emotions
- Inability to articulate thoughts and feelings about deceased
- Fear of intimacy, fear of failure, fear of future loss
- Self-destructive relationships
- Self-defeating behaviors
- Chronic numbness, alienation, isolation
- Chronic anger and/or depression
A mourner has the right....
...to experience your own unique grief.
...to talk about your grief.
...to feel a multitude of emotions.
...to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.
...to experience “griefbursts.”
...to embrace your spirituality.
...to treasure your memories.
...to move toward your grief and heal.

By Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.
What to Say

Helping Words:
1. “It may take a long time to adjust.”
2. “I am here for you.”
3. “I have been thinking of you.”
4. “I am here to help you with this.”
5. “This must be extremely hard, it must hurt so much.”
6. “I will not forget your loved one.”
7. “If you need to talk, I will listen.”
8. Offer to listen and not rush the grieving process.
What NOT to Say

Harming Words:
1. “I know exactly how you feel.”
2. “Do not cry.”
3. “Just move on, get over it.”
4. “Everything happens for a reason.”
5. “You need to be strong.”
6. “It was all for the best.”
7. “Time heals all wounds.”
8. Do not make it about you as the friend.
What You Say

stay strong.
What They Hear

YOUR SADNESS IS A WEAKNESS.
What You Say

I know how you feel.
What They Hear

I assume all grief is the same.
What You Say

YOU ARE NEVER GIVEN MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE.
What They Hear

YOU SHOULD HAVE NO PROBLEM HANDLING THIS.
Stages of Grief

DENIAL → ANGER → BARGAINING → DEPRESSION → ACCEPTANCE

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Stages of Grief
Worden's Tasks of Mourning

Task #1
To Accept the Reality of the Loss

Task #2
To Work Through the Pain of Grief

Task #3
To Adjust to an Environment in Which the Deceased is Missing

Task #4
To Find an Enduring Connection with the Deceased While Embarking on a New Life

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The Six R’s of Mourning

- Recognize the loss
- React to the separation
- Recollect and re-experience the deceased
- Relinquish old attachments
- Reinvest emotional energy
- Accommodation

by Therese Rando, PhD
The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement

A Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement

Stroebé & Schut (1999)

Everyday Life Experience

Loss-oriented
- Grief work
- Intrusion of grief
- Breaking bonds/ties
- Denial/avoidance of restoration changes

Restoration-oriented
- Attending to life changes
- Doing new things
- Distraction from grief
- Denial/avoidance of grief
- New roles/identity/relationship

Death Studies 23(3):197-224

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Grieving Patterns

Intuitive Grievers
- Feelings of intense emotional pain
- Tears are common
- Gain strength and solace from openly sharing
- Find verbalizing and expressing emotions helpful
- Find reminiscing and storytelling beneficial

Instrumental Grievers
- More attuned to thoughts than feelings
- Process grief cognitively
- Tend to focus on external problems
- Focus on tasks, goals, reason, activities, and purpose
- Tend to be private and solitary with their grief
Appropriate Expectations You Can Have for Yourself in Grief

- Your grief may take longer than most people think.
- Your grief may depend upon how you perceive the loss.
- You may grieve for many things, both symbolic and tangible, not just the death alone.
- You may grieve for what you have already lost and for what you have lost for the future. You may grieve for all the hopes, dreams and unfilled expectations you had and needs that will go unmet.
- You may have a combination of anger and guilt, also including irritability, frustration, annoyance or lack of tolerance.
- You may feel like you are going crazy.
- You may be obsessed with the death and preoccupied with the deceased.
Empathy vs. Sympathy

Empathy: “feeling with”

Sympathy: “feeling for”
What You Say

Let me know if you need anything.
What They Hear

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HEAR FROM ME IN A WHILE.
Factors Influencing the Grieving Process

- Nature of the relationship
- Nature of the death (anticipated versus sudden, age of the person who died, the griever’s sense of responsibility for the death, the potential stigma surrounding the death)
- The griever’s unique personality
- Unique characteristics of the person who died
- The griever’s developmental level
- Social expectations based on the griever’s gender
- Availability of support systems
- The griever’s cultural or ethnic background
- Religious or spiritual influences
- Other crises or stresses in the griever’s life
- Earlier experiences with death
Did I Lose You, Yet?
Full or Empty? - Activity

“IN” Total: ___
“OUT” Total: ___
What You Say

They’re in a better place.
What They Hear

They're better off without you.
What You Say

They are no longer in pain.
What They Hear

YOU ARE BEEN SELFISH FOR WISHING THEY WERE STILL HERE.
Things To Do

- Tell the story, over and over, again if you need to.
- Use the name of the person who died.
- Keep a journal.
- Keep a memento of the person.
- Laugh with friend.
- Cry.
- Eat, sleep, and drink water.
- Light candles.
- Listen to music.
- Write a letter to the person.
A Tangled “Ball” of Emotions

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What You Say

They wouldn't want you to be sad.
What They Hear

YOU'RE NOT HANDLING THIS CORRECTLY.
What You Say

This too shall pass.
What They Hear

YOU HAVE A TIME LIMIT ON GRIEVING FOR YOUR LOVED ONE.
Kvetching Order

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Coping with Grief

How we want grief to work

How grief actually works