

HELPING THOSE EXPERIENCING GRIEF

by Sherry Hoyt-Cline



INTRODUCTION

Grieving is natural and normal

NOT Grieving Is unnatural

Grief is as individual as those of us who feel it, and as varied as the circumstances of the loss which occur.

Common Symptoms of Grief

Since grief can be so painful and overwhelming, it frightens us. Many people worry if they are grieving in the "right way" and wonder if the feelings they have are normal.


MOST PEOPLE WHO SUFFER A LOSS EXPERIENCE ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- ▶ feel tightness in the throat or heaviness in the chest
- ▶ have an empty feeling in their stomach or lose their appetite
- ▶ feel guilty at times and angry at other times

Common Symptoms of Grief

- ▶ feel restless and look for activity but find it difficult to concentrate
- ▶ sense the loved one's presence; finding themselves expecting the person to walk in the door at the usual time; hearing their voice and/or seeing their face
- ▶ wander aimlessly and forget, not finishing things they have started to do around the house
- ▶ have difficulty sleeping and dream of their loved one

Common Symptoms of Grief

- ▶ feel intensely angry at the loved one for leaving them
 - ▶ need to tell and retell; remembering things about the loved one and the experience of their death
 - ▶ cry at unexpected times
 - ▶ feel their mood change over the slightest things
 - ▶ feel guilty or angry over things that happened or didn't happen in the relationship with the deceased
- 

Original stages used for grief

- ▶ Probably the most well-known of these stages might be from *Elizabeth Kubler-Ross'* book, "On Death and Dying." In it, she identified five stages that a dying patient experiences when informed of their terminal prognosis. The stages Kubler-Ross identified are:
 - ▶ Denial (this isn't *happening* to me!)
 - ▶ Anger (why is this happening to *me*?)
 - ▶ Bargaining (I promise I'll be a better person *if...*)
 - ▶ Depression (I don't *care* anymore)
 - ▶ Acceptance (*I'm ready* for whatever comes)

Newer definitions

A lesser known definition of the stages of grief is described by *Dr. Roberta Temes* in the book, "Living With An Empty Chair - a guide through grief." Temes describes three particular types of behavior exhibited by those suffering from grief and loss. They are:

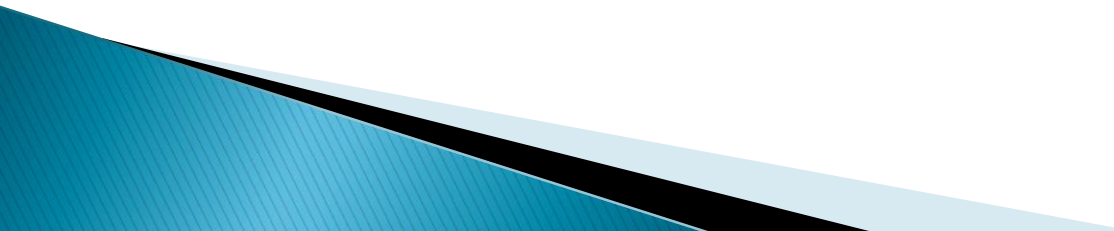
- ▶ Numbness (mechanical functioning and social insulation)
- ▶ Disorganization (intensely painful feelings of loss)
- ▶ Reorganization (re-entry into a more 'normal' social life.)

Another set of terms

It is now known that grief does not occur in stages or in an orderly fashion over a certain period of time.

Other researchers such as Parkes, Clayton, Zisook and Shuchter have delineated 3 stages of bereavement as encompassing the various different feelings. Rather than following each other according to any predictable timetable, the stages “blend into and replace one another ...[and] people can move back and forth through the phases so that, years after a bereavement, the discovery of a photograph in a drawer or a visit from an old friend can evoke another episode of pining” (Parkes, 1998).

3 Main Stages of Grief:

- ▶ **Stage I: numbness or impact**
 - ▶ **Stage II: recoil or depression**
 - ▶ **Stage III: recovery**
- 

STAGE I: IMPACT

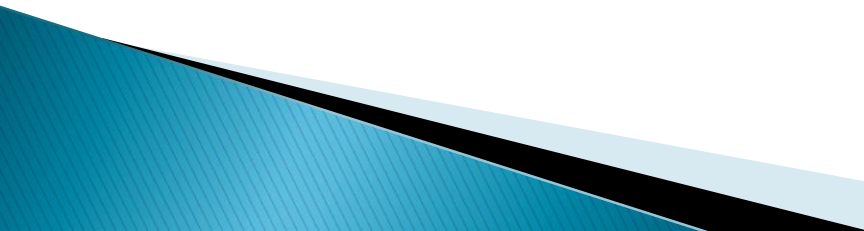
THE PERSON EXPERIENCES A SENSE OF SHOCK AND DISBELIEF OVER THE LOSS

A. What The Person Is Experiencing In Stage I

In the first days and weeks following a death/loss, shock, disbelief and even denial are the defining feelings and sensations. One may feel as if he/she is walking in a daze or have little concept of the passage of hours or days. Life may feel as if it stands still, or you feel unprepared for making decisions—things are happening too quickly.

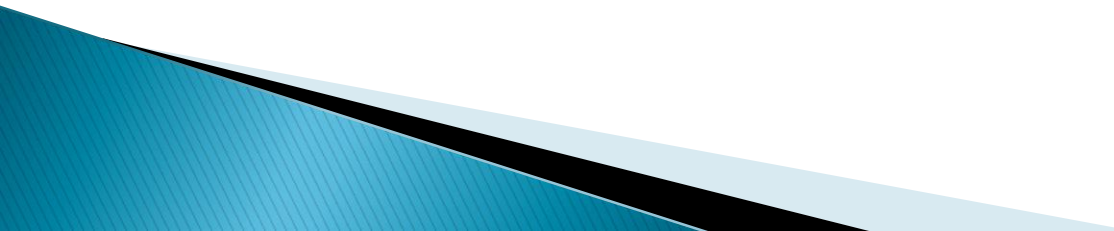
Examples of what they say/do

DENIAL:

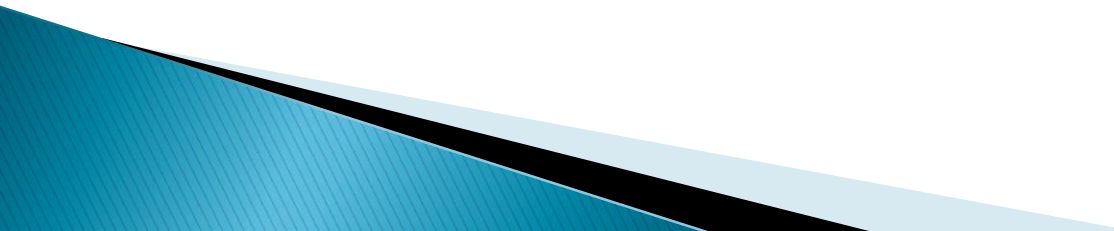
- ▶ “It must be a mistake. It can't be true.”
 - ▶ refusing to talk about the person
 - ▶ keeping items belonging to the person
 - ▶ refusal to attend funeral or visit grave
- 

STAGE I: IMPACT

B. What The Helper Can Do During The Impact Stage

1. Just Be There; it is OK not to know what to say
 2. Accept their feelings, focus on griever's frame of reference
 3. Don't challenge the denial
 4. Listen (Use CORE skills)
- 

B. What The Helper Can Do During The Impact Stage

5. Express your own grief
 6. Let the griever make as many decisions as possible
 7. Help them to avoid rash decisions
 - 8 . Empathize rather than identify
- 

STAGE II: RECOIL

SHOCK AND DENIAL GIVES WAY TO AWARENESS OF THE REALITY OF THE LOSS AS THE PERSON EXPERIENCES PAINFUL FEELINGS AND BEGINS TO STRUGGLE WITH MAKING EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENTS

A. What The Person Is Experiencing In Stage II

As the realization and meaning of the death/loss becomes apparent, other painful and uncomfortable feelings develop and are more prevalent. The variety of feelings progresses from yearning or pining and protest to disorganization.

A. What The Person Is Experiencing In Stage II

- ▶ In addition to new feelings of anger and anxiety, one is acutely aware of the emptiness of time and place, realizing and experiencing familiar situations that are now changed. Social withdrawal is commonplace. One longs for the presence, companionship, care and counsel, attention and love of the one who has died. One can feel disorganized as the routine and structure of life has been altered and new structures have yet to be created. This stage can endure for weeks or even through the first year.

Examples of what they say

ANGER :

at God: “Why did you do this to me? I thought you were a loving God?”

at self: “I should have done something” or “It’s my fault.”

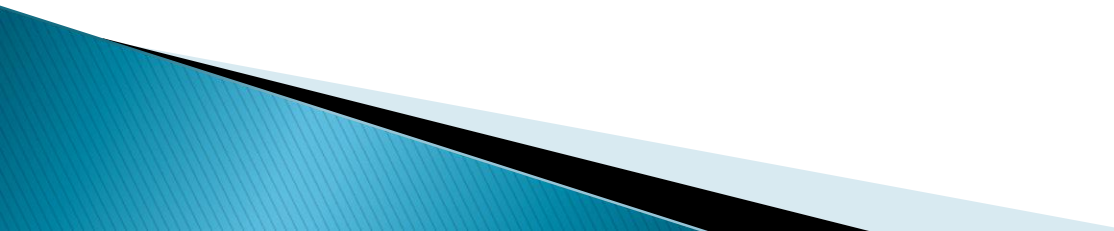
at doctors/medical personnel: “They were incompetent” or “They made a mistake.”

at disease or person who caused accident: “It’s their fault.”

at person who died: “How dare you leave me.”

Examples of what they do/feel

DEPRESSION:

- ▶ Sleeping too much or insomnia
 - ▶ Crying
 - ▶ Withdrawal from others
 - ▶ Eating too much or too little
 - ▶ Lethargy
 - ▶ Increased pain levels
 - ▶ Ambivalence, indecision
 - ▶ Reduced concentration/preoccupation
- 

Examples of what they say/do

BARGAINING:

- ▶ “I promise I’ll _____ if you’ll _____.”
- ▶ “If only I/you had _____, you’d still be alive.”
- ▶ “If only I had _____, I would _____.”
- ▶ Pray
- ▶ Institutionalized bargaining

B. What The Helper Can Do In The Recoil Stage

1. Be available

2. Be aware of Special Dates

3. Encourage emotional expression

4. Encourage Expression Of Specific Feelings

a. Missing the deceased

b. Anger or Hostility

c. Guilt

B. What The Helper Can Do In The Recoil Stage

5. Avoid Saying Platitudes

6. When Platitudes Are Said By The Helpee

7. When Platitudes Are Said By Others

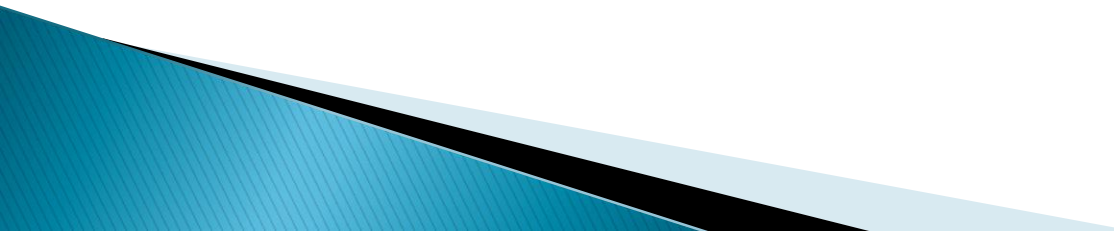
8. Mobilize Support

STAGE III: RECOVERY

- ▶ THE PERSON “COMPLETES” THE GRIEF PROCESS BY ADAPTING TO HIS OR HER NEW ENVIRONMENT OR SITUATION IN LIFE
- ▶ If death was the loss, at this point, the person has come to an acceptance of the death even though he/she maintains an emotional involvement with the person who has died. Gradually remembering and reminiscing can bring comfort rather than distress. And over time, the person can adjust so as to let new friends and even intimate partners occupy the deceased person’s space, role or place of affection.

Acceptance / Recovery

A. What the person is experiencing in the Recovery Stage

- Begins to have balance in ones life
 - Invests physical and emotional energy in tasks of living
 - Comes to understand why someone died or how the death has meaning
 - Develop new relationships and deepen existing ones
 - Emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life
- 

ACCEPTANCE:

- check through first four stages for evidence of on-going issues
- talking about person, looking at pictures, reviewing good and bad memories, all without tears
- anniversaries without tears

B. What The Helper Can Do In The Recovery Stage

- 1. Encourage New Social Relationships**
 - 2. Keep In Touch**
 - 3. Keep Your Third Ear Tuned**
- 

References

Stages of Grief

Robin F. Goodman, PhD, ATR-BC an
article on website

<https://www.achievementsolutions.net/achievementsolutions/en/Content.do?contentId=3539>