

Grief

Grief is a natural emotional reaction to a significant loss of someone or something that can be associated with many life changes and transitions. The loss can either be sudden or expected. It is also the process of working through the pain of loss, which is necessary for functioning-, **NOT** a sign of weakness.

Losses that may cause grief:

- Death of a spouse, family member or friend
- Personal illness or injury
- Loss or gain of a career opportunity
- Death of a pet
- End of a relationship
- Leaving home/ moving to a new place
- Sudden close of a life goal
- Loss of income
- Loss of pregnancy
- Graduation

Common reactions to grief:

Physical:

- Heart palpitations
- Tightness of throat
- Sweating
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Loss of appetite
- Sleep disturbances
- Difficulty concentrating

Emotional:

- Feelings of guilt
- Hostility or irritability
- Anger towards oneself, the deceased, God, or those responsible for the loss
- Loneliness, emptiness and numbness
- Withdrawal from others and society
- Intense sadness
- Loss of life's meaning

Stages of grief:

- Denial, numbness, and shock
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Anger
- Acceptance

It is important to note that no two people are likely to experience grief in the same way. Different stages of the grieving process have been identified, but they are not intended to occur in a certain order, nor will all individuals experience every stage.

Factors that can interfere with the grief process:

- Avoiding/minimizing emotions
- Using alcohol or drugs to mask grief
- Acting resentful to those who try to help
- Use of work to avoid feelings
- Unrealistic promises that were made to the deceased

Factors that can facilitate the grief process:

- Allow time to fully experience thoughts and feelings openly with yourself- crying can help
- Get support from friends and family
- Put off unnecessary decisions and set small goals
- Plan and allow yourself to enjoy good times without guilt
- See a counselor
- Expect and accept reduction in your usual efficiency
- Journal your feelings
- Maintain healthy eating, exercise, and sleep patterns
- Set aside a specific time daily to remember and experience whatever feelings arise
- Be kind to yourself and envision a hopeful future

If grief persists for too long, or becomes too intense, it can lead to serious disorders of anxiety or depression. If this occurs, it may be a sign that counseling is needed to promote a healthy grieving process.

Ways to help others through the grief process:

- Communicate concern for the grieving person
- Be available
- Acknowledge the difficulties with having easy answers to questions concerning loss
- Be patient and supportive
- Avoid making judgments about how the person should feel during their grief

It is important to **NOT** rationalize positive aspects from the loss, mention how a loss could have been prevented, compare grief to someone else's, push the grieving to talk about their feelings or force physical gestures such as hand holding. Never take rejection from the grieving as a personal attack on your relationship.

Remember, grieving is not forgetting, or drowning in tears. Grieving in a healthy way will result in the ability to maintain the importance of the loss with a sense of peace rather than pain. No matter how intense the grief may be, it is only temporary. Work through the emotions of grief- do not try to stop them. It's OK to cry. **THERE IS LIFE AFTER GRIEF!**

Getting Help:

If you are concerned about yourself or someone that is presenting these symptoms or behaviors, one should be aware that there are many facilities and a variety of counselors to help individuals deal with grief. If you are a University of Louisiana at Lafayette student, and are concerned and would like to speak to a counselor, please contact the Counseling and Testing Center at 482-6480 for more information. The center offers unlimited confidential sessions, free of charge to all students and university faculty/staff members.