

TEN STAGES OF GRIEF

The work of grief must be pursued within the heart of the mourner, and it cannot be hurried. It takes a great deal of time, usually a year or more. It may be the purest pain you have ever known. The death of a spouse has been rated the most stressful of all life change situations. What is happening to you is of all things natural. That knowledge will not lessen your pain, or minimize your grief, but it may give you courage, when possible, to give yourself up to it. That is the only way healing can begin.

1. SHOCK

Some never go through a prolonged stage of shock and are able to express their emotions immediately. Others will say "I feel numb" and no emotions or tears come. Sometimes there is denial. Gradually the bereaved become aware of what has happened, and they are able to cry or show their emotions.

2. EMOTIONAL RELEASE

One begins to feel and to hurt. Many people begin at this point. It is good to cry in grief. If one does not express this emotion, it will be expressed in some other way – on the physical or emotional level. Some people need to be induced to cry. This is particularly true of men, as our culture makes many men feel uneasy to cry.

3. PREOCCUPATION WITH THE DECEASED

The bereaved may try to think of other things but finds him(her)self unable to shift his(her) mind from thoughts about the deceased person. The widowed person continues to feel married for quite often a long period of time. This is normal.

4. SYMPTOMS OF SOME PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESSES

a) These distresses may come in waves, some lasting from 20 minutes to a full hour.

The most common physical distresses are:

- 1) sleeplessness
- 2) tightness in the throat
- 3) choking, with shortness of breath
- 4) a need for sighing
- 5) empty, hollow feeling in the stomach
- 6) lack of muscular power (e.g. – “It’s almost impossible to climb stairs”, or “Everything I lift seems so heavy”.)
- 7) digestive symptoms and poor appetite (e.g. – the food “tastes like sand”)

b) Closely associated with the physical distresses may be certain emotional alterations.

The most common are:

- 1) slight sense of unreality
- 2) feeling of emotional distance from people – that no one really cares or understands.
- 3) sometimes people appear shadowy or very small
- 4) sometimes there are feelings of panic, thoughts of self-destruction, or the desire to run away or “chuck it all”.

These emotional disturbances may cause many to feel that they are approaching insanity, but these feelings are normal.

5. HOSTILE REACTIONS

There is often a disconcerting loss of warmth in relationships and a tendency to respond with irritability and anger. These feelings are surprising and inexplicable to the bereaved. This often makes the bereaved feel they are going insane. Anger may be directed at the doctor, the nurse, God, or the minister (who is a representative of God). Often, too, there may be feelings of hurt or of hostility towards family members who do not, or for various reasons cannot, provide the emotional support the bereaved person may have expected from them.

6. GUILT

There is most always some sense of guilt in grief. The bereaved think of the many things they felt they could have or should have done, but didn't. They accuse themselves of negligence. Furthermore, if a person was hostile toward the deceased there will be guilt. The more hostility, the greater the guilt. It is important to note that no two people can live together without some sort of hurt being done. These hurts pop up in grief. Guilt is normal.

7. DEPRESSION

Many bereaved feel total despair, unbearable loneliness and hopelessness; nothing seems worthwhile. These feelings may be even more intense for those who live alone or who have little family. These feelings are normal.

8. WITHDRAWAL

The bereaved tend to withdraw from social relationships, and most likely, their usual daily routines are disrupted. Life seems like a bad dream. This is normal.<O:P>

9. THE BEREAVED BEGIN TO RE-ENTER RELATIONSHIPS

Time and ventilation of feelings will finally produce a better situation. All of a sudden light shines through the gloom and the darkness of despair, and life comes into clearer focus. The person readjusts to his environment in which the deceased is missing and forms new relationships.

10. RESOLUTION AND READJUSTMENT TO REALITY

This gradually comes, but the scar is still there. There will come times when cycles of grief will hit the person, and there will be emotional outbursts; but this is normal.

To move through these ten stages it is necessary for the bereaved to express their tears, their angers, their guilt, their despair. The biggest obstacle to moving through the process to the 9th and 10th stage is that many people try to avoid the intense pain that is involved in the process. Therefore, it is important to ventilate all one's feelings during grief. When you do begin to emerge on the other side, to take a dim interest in things outside of yourself, you will not be the same person. You do not believe it now, but you will be better. By experiencing deep emotion, and accepting it, you will grow in warmth, depth, understanding and wisdom. You will be more truly yourself than you have ever been before.

Recovery over Time

Traumatic events usually lead to a variety of internal changes in the family. Such changes include changes in outlook on life and expectations about future, there may be a development of subtle posttraumatic reactions that continue to influence a person's life, i.e. at anniversaries, or for some years of continued longing and searching for the lost person. Over time, however, most families, even those who lost a loved one, are able to establish new continuity, and live on with both happy and sad memories. The long and tiresome task of establishing new meanings and verifying old may go on for years. In the following I will focus on some of the

challenges for families in dealing with the event, with ensuring that adults and children continue to communicate in ways that benefit them in the long run. The changes and problems that occur in families do not necessarily lead to dysfunction at work or in school, but continue to influence the family. For many, the loss of a loved one means that some life spheres never will be as before, while others will normalize over time. Some survivors are able to return to normal fairly soon, while others struggle for a long time.