References

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Brooklyn College, Massey Univ, Univ of Buffalo, Univ of Iowa, Texas State, Univ of Mary Washington, Univ of Florida, Univ of Cincinnati, Kansas State, Univ of NC Chapel Hill, George Washington Univ, Univ of IL, Univ of Washington.

Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy (1991) Worden

Recommended Reading

On Death and Dying (1969) Kubler-Ross
Death, The Final Stage of Growth (1975) Kubler-Ross

Dealing with Grief

The Georgia Tech Counseling Center is a unit of the Division of Student Affairs. The Center is dedicated to enhancing the academic experience and success of all students by providing a variety of counseling and psychological services to individuals and the campus community. We provide short-term counseling services to address a wide range of personal and career concerns. Our services are available at no charge to currently enrolled students.

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Rev. Dec 2012
**Definition of Grief:**
The death of someone we love, a close friend or family member, is an event we all have to face sometime. Grief is the normal process of learning to survive the feelings of sadness and loss. Grieving is a process you go through, rather than “get over.” Many people have to learn to let go of wishes to be the exact same person they were before the loss. Grieving is a process you go through, rather than “get over.” By going through your own grief process, you will develop personal strengths that will serve you throughout your lifetime.

**Common Grief Reactions**
For some, it is reassuring to know common reactions to loss, as many of these symptoms can be misinterpreted. The important point is to remember to respect your grief reactions and to let yourself experience them like a wave that passes through you.

- **Feelings:** Numbness, sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, apathy, relief, denial
- **Thoughts:** Disbelief, intrusive images, sense of presence, forgetfulness, more easily confused, difficulty concentrating, transient illogical experiences where you think you see or hear the deceased, preoccupation with thoughts about the deceased
- **Behaviors:** Sleep disturbances, appetite disturbances, social withdrawal, absent-minded behaviors, change in activity level, dreams of deceased, avoiding reminders of deceased, cultivating reminders of deceased, crying, searching and calling out to deceased verbally or sub-vocally
- **Physical Sensations:** Hollowness in stomach, tightness in throat, short of breath, weak muscles, sighing, oversensitivity to noise, dry mouth, lack of energy, restless over activity, exaggerated startle response, increased physical complaints or illnesses

**Ways to Cope with Grief**
While there is no “right way” to grieve, “Active, healthy grieving requires balance — balancing the time you spend directly working on your grief with the time you spend coping with your day-to-day life; balancing the amount of time you spend with others with the time you spend alone; balancing your need for help from others with caring for yourself. Treat yourself with the same care, tolerance, and affection you would extend to a valued friend in a similar situation.”

- Participate in rituals or ceremonies to help make the loss feel more “real” which helps you move toward integrating the loss and being open to healing.
- Be patient with yourself as you go through the waves of grief. You will likely experience sudden “out of the blue” reminders or feelings. During these tougher times, remind yourself some days will be better than others.
- Acknowledge and accept all feelings, both positive and negative. Remind yourself that neither type of feeling can negate the other. Also remind yourself that holding in feelings results in being able to do nothing about them except hold them, which in essence cuts our emotional life on hold and prevents healing.
- Discuss the loss, relationship memories and your feelings with supportive others who are able to listen versus try to push you to close up too quickly. Be assertive in letting others know what type of help fits you best.
- Remember to take care of yourself—eat regularly, rest, exercise, and plan for enjoyable activities without guilt (the goal is balance, not martyrdom).
- Journal. Healthy grieving will teach you many lifelong lessons.
- Avoid making any big or sudden decisions in attempts to reduce the pain.
- Avoid overworking yourself. Be mindful that bereavement often involves temporary reduction in your usual efficiency and consistency, so guard against taking on new projects too soon.
- Minimize or avoid drugs, alcohol, and smoking.
- Let yourself think about the unfinished business you have with the deceased and play out in your mind a resolution. Find a way that feels comfortable to “talk to” your special person, whether that involves going to a specific place, listening to music, etc.

**Healing Tasks**
No matter how badly we feel, we can heal and live full, happy lives again. Healing does not mean that you will never experience sadness about the loss again, it means you have let go of the pain that makes it difficult to continue your life. Healing involves the following four tasks:

1. Accept the reality of the loss
2. Experience the pain of grief
3. Adjust to life without the deceased
4. Find an appropriate place for the deceased in your emotional life so you feel comfortable reinvesting back into life.