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Download Article Download Article Everyone experiences grief differently and there is no one way to help a person suffering from grief. Instead of trying to impose your own vision of what the grieving person needs, you should be there to offer companionship, a shoulder to cry on, and emotional validation. They will need to spend time grieving. You should tell them that their feelings are natural and encourage them to find their own way of commemorating their loved one. 1 Act as a companion. Each person's experience with grief is different.[1] That means that no level of expertise will equip you to tell the person in mourning how they should respond. Your role is to provide company, listen, and validate their feelings. Don't tell, listen. Constantly reinforce that their response is normal and natural. Encourage them to use their own skills to cope with grief.[2] If they are an artist, encourage them to use this ability to express their feelings. 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He specializes in eclectic non-denominational yoga guidance, grief therapy, complex trauma recovery and mindful mortal skills development. He has a MSW from Washington University in St. Louis and an MA Certification in Thanatology from Marian University of Fond du Lac. He became certified with the International Association of Yoga Therapists after completing his 500 training hours at Yoga Tree in San Francisco and Ananda Seva Mission in Santa Rosa, CA. This article has been viewed 104,109 times. Co-authors: 16 Updated: February 24, 2025 Views: 104,109 Categories: Psychology Careers Print Send fan mail to authors Thanks to all authors for creating a page that has been read 104,109 times. "The overall presentation of grief counseling was refreshingly straightforward and seems well supported. As a the lesson starts, you don't get as much theory as practical method. But the introduction gives ample grounding, so learning is intuitive..." more Share your story Skip to content Choosing a selection results in a full page refresh. Press the space key then arrow keys to make a selection. Grief is an unfortunate but inevitable part of life. Whether due to the death of a loved one (this type of grief is referred to as bereavement), losing a job, or any other significant life change, grief is the universal response to dealing with loss. What are the five stages of grief? We describe each, and how to find support through the grieving process. What are the 5 stages of grief? Although everyone copes with loss in different ways, there are five commonly defined stages of grief. The stages were first described by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book On Death and Dying. They help provide a framework for the complex thoughts, behaviors, and emotions that are often experienced with the loss of a loved one. While these stages should not be thought of as resolute — not everyone experiences these stages in the same way or in the same order, if at all — understanding them can help you make sense of the emotions you may be feeling. Denial Denial refers to the period of grieving during which a person refuses to accept the reality of a situation. Denial is different than not understanding. It is a defense mechanism that helps us protect ourselves from the pain of accepting the reality of a situation. For example, if a person is grieving the loss of a loved one, they might deny the reality of the loss, saying, "I don't know what happened. The doctor must have made a mistake." This is a way to avoid the pain of accepting the reality of the loss. It is important to understand that denial is a natural response directed toward one's family members, doctors, God, or even the deceased. Anger is a normal part of the grieving process, though it may seem hurtful or offensive to loved ones. Often, anger is just a manifestation of grief, and can present itself in various ways. For example: blaming a medical doctor for not preventing an illness; blaming family members for a lack of care or support; feeling angry toward God or a higher spiritual power; feeling angry with oneself or blaming oneself for the death; experiencing a short temper or loss of patience. Bargaining When we experience grief, we often feel hopeless and overwhelmed. It is common to be overcome by statements of "what if" and "if only," as we experience a loss of control over what is happening. During the bargaining stage of grief, a person attempts to negotiate or make compromises. We try to make agreements with ourselves, or a deal with a higher power, in exchange for feeling less sad or having a different outcome. Bargaining is often irrational. Examples of bargaining include: "If only I had brought her to the doctor sooner, this would have been cured." "If only I had been around more, I would have noticed something was wrong." "God, if you bring him back, I promise I will never lie again." Depression Depression is a feeling of sadness and hopelessness that often results with the loss of a loved one. While the earlier stages of grief help to protect us from the emotional pain experienced with loss, often these feelings are inevitable. Symptoms of depression include: feelings of sadness; loss of interest in activities you normally enjoy; changes in sleep; significant changes in weight; lack of energy; feeling agitated or restless; feeling worthless or guilty; decreased concentration. Feelings of depression are a natural reaction to grief. Following the loss of a loved one, acute grief can impact your ability to function. You might feel exhausted, you might lose motivation, sleep too much, or too little, or stop caring about the things you love. Withdrawal from friends or skipping responsibilities isn't unusual. This is just part of grieving. If you need help, please ask for it. You don't have to do this alone. 9. Loneliness Loneliness creeps in, even when you're surrounded by people. It often shows up after the initial flurry of activity fades away. You might feel like no one really gets what you're going through. Missing the person or thing you lost can make you feel isolated. Reaching out, even in small ways, can slowly help. You're not alone as you might feel, though it's easy to forget that. 9. Acceptance Acceptance isn't about forgetting. It's more about realizing the loss is real and facing the changes it brings. You might start new routines or find ways to remember your loved one. There's still sadness, but maybe less resistance. Acceptance comes and goes. For most people, it's a gradual thing, not a single moment. It's an important part of the various stages of grief. 10. Hope Hope sneaks in as you start to think about the future again. Maybe you notice small moments of relief or even happiness. You might imagine enjoying things again or making plans that once felt impossible. As pain fades a bit, hope grows. It's subtle, but hope helps you rebuild. It's not about erasing the loss, just finding a little light. 11. Renewal Renewal is about putting the pieces back together. Maybe you pick up new habits, set different goals, or make new friends. You're not erasing the past. You're just learning to move forward with your memories and your new reality. Trying new things or making plans—no matter how small—can help. It helps you find energy and a sense of purpose again, even if you're still grieving. 12. Meaning Meaning helps you find some purpose or understanding from your loss. It usually comes at the end of many models of grief. You may honor your loved one or try to help others using what you've learned. Some people build new traditions, share stories, or even make changes in their lives inspired by grief. Finding meaning can help turn pain into growth. It may not erase grief, but makes living with it a little easier. Why No Two People Experience Grief the Same Way Everyone experiences grief differently, even if you've lost the same person. Your journey might feel like a tidal wave, while someone else seems oddly calm. Neither is wrong. Grief changes their daily routine. Things you once enjoyed might not feel the same. Facing the reality of the loss of someone can make regular activities seem pointless or difficult for a while. Grief's impact on Sleep, Concentration, and Immune Health Shows when you're coping with grief. Maybe you can't fall asleep or just want to sleep all day. Poor sleep can leave you extra tired and irritable. Your focus can also tank. Reading, working, or even chatting with someone might suddenly feel like a struggle. Grief can weaken your immune system. You might get sick more easily, or old health issues might flare up. This happens because stress during the many stages of grief can drag down your body's defenses, as shown in health studies on bereavement. Risk of Complicated Grief or Prolonged Grief Disorder Sometimes, the effects of loss just don't let up. You might face complicated grief or prolonged grief disorder, meaning that deep sadness and longing stick around for months or even years. This kind of grief can spiral into depression or anxiety. You might avoid reminders of your loss or start questioning life's meaning. Physical health can slide, too. People with prolonged grief face higher risks of heart problems, sleep issues, and even early death, according to research on grief and health complications. It's worth watching for these symptoms and getting support early. The Role of Compassion-Focused Therapy in the Grieving Process Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) is something mental health professionals use to help people work through grief. It centers on building self-kindness, understanding tough emotions, and learning how to cope after a loss. How CFT Helps Regulate Shame, Guilt, and Self-Criticism During grief, shame and guilt show up a lot. Maybe you blame yourself for things you did or didn't do. CFT teaches you to answer these thoughts with self-compassion instead of negativity. A big part of CFT is learning to spot your inner critic and see how it affects you. You practice things like self-kindness and compassionate self-talk to soften those harsh thoughts. Research shows it's easier to accept your feelings when you practice self-compassion. Prolonged grief and big emotional health. You get better at recognizing tough thoughts about your loss and moving away with less inner conflict. For more details on studies and results, see group-based Compassion-Focused Therapy for prolonged grief symptoms. The Importance of Creating a Safe, Soothing Emotional Space Feeling safe really matters when you're healing from loss. Concentration and Immune Health Shows when you're coping with grief. This safety makes it easier to talk about painful memories, fears, or hopes. Techniques might include calming breathing, guided imagery, and gentle encouragement. Visual tools like a "soothing colors" chart or a "comforting memory" list can keep you grounded. This kind of support lowers anxiety and helps you face grief without feeling overwhelmed. By focusing on comfort and safety, therapists help you build trust and get stronger at handling tough emotions. How Therapists at the Compassion Practice Support Healing Therapists trained in CFT specialize in helping you work through grief. They encourage self-kindness and help you spot where your feelings come from. That's what you'll experience at The Compassion Practice. Here are some ways our therapists support you: Modeling compassion: They show you how to treat yourself with care, even when your emotions feel overwhelming. Teaching emotional regulation: You learn techniques for calming your body and mind during those intense waves of grief. Offering structured exercises: Sometimes you'll write self-compassion letters or set up routines that help you build resilience. Providing ongoing support: Regular sessions let you track how you're doing and tweak strategies as you grow. Our specialists act as partners, giving you practical tools to handle grief with strength and gentleness. It's about turning tough emotions into small steps toward healing. You're Not Alone: Building a Support System for Coping with Loss Grief can feel crushing, but leaning on others can lighten things. Building a support system makes it easier to find solace and start healing. The Power of Friends, Family, and Community Trusted friends, family, and community networks can be a lifeline. They can listen to you, help you understand your own process, or even help you take a break from your own process. You don't have to go through grief alone. You can talk to a professional, join support groups, or read books on the 12-step model of grief. Do the steps happen in order? Not always. The 12 steps are a way to understand the impact of the loss, but they don't follow a sequence. You might revisit some steps, skip others, or experience several at once. What if I skip a step? Grief is a process that is highly personal. If a particular emotion or stage doesn't resonate with your experience, that doesn't mean you're grieving "wrong." Your process is valid, however it unfolds. How can the 12 steps of grief aid in the process of healing from trauma? Different grief stages can help you spot and understand your feelings at different stages. This structure can make it easier to work through complex emotions, one step at a time. Can the 12 steps of grief be applied to situations other than death? Yes, the 12 stages can also help you cope with the loss of jobs, relationships, serious illness, or any major life change. Are these steps backed by science or just a helpful tool? The twelve steps of grief are more of a supportive framework than a clinical diagnosis. They combine insights from psychological models with lived experiences. Download Article Download Article Everyone experiences grief differently and there is no one way to help a person suffering from grief. Instead of trying to impose your own vision of what the grieving person needs, you should be there to offer companionship, a shoulder to cry on, and emotional validation. They will need to spend time grieving. You should tell them that their feelings are natural and encourage them to find their own way of commemorating their loved one. 1 Act as a companion. Each person's experience with grief is different.[1] That means that no level of expertise will equip you to tell the person in mourning how they should respond. 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