

Week 9: Handout A

COMMON REACTIONS TO GRIEF

Although grief is a normal response to loss, sometimes we experience behaviors in ourselves which can be frightening to us and cause concern to those who observe us. Every person grieves in a unique way, but some of the following descriptions may fit you. These behaviors are typical of grief. Not all of these behaviors are healthy and some need to be changed, but they are "understandable" and do not indicate anything about your mental health or personality.

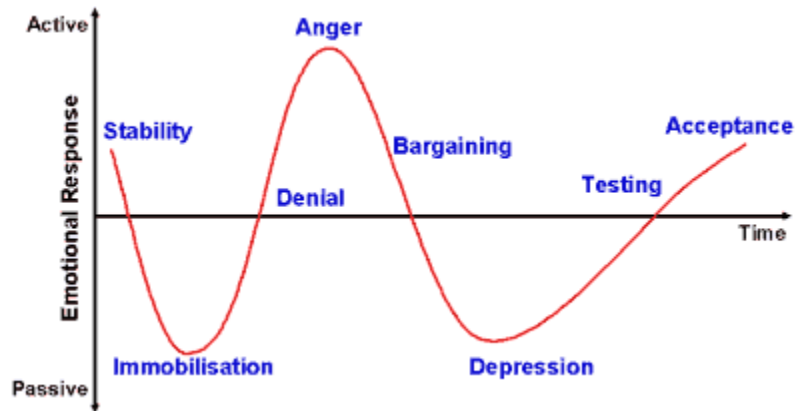
- Unable to find consolation in your faith or spiritual practices.
- Anger at the medical personnel who didn't seem to do enough, or didn't have the technology to save your loved one...or the counselor who couldn't change your partner.
- Anger at yourself for not understanding what your partner was doing, or how your partner was hurting you.
- Disturbance in sleep patterns...either not able to sleep or sleeping too much.
- Change in eating habits, either eating too much or not enough, and experiencing weight gain or loss.
- Unable to motivate yourself to do the things you know you need to do.
- Unable to problem-solve or make decisions.
- Unable to concentrate or remember things.
- Not making good judgments about others or about you.
- Finding yourself easily irritated.
- Crying or weeping uncontrollably for no apparent reason.
- Fearful of leaving the house, or of being alone.
- Fearful of staying in the house and afraid to sleep in your bed.
- Wanting someone to be punished or to damage something because of your pain.
- Angry that no one seems to get what you lost or that others just want you to "get on" with your life.
- Angry that you aren't able to function as well as you did before the loss.
- Angry that you don't have enough time to grieve and feeling that others are ignoring or avoiding your pain.
- Driving fast or recklessly.
- Feeling anger when other people are happy, or going on a vacation or enjoying weekends and holidays.
- Feeling frustrated that people are indulging you or leaving you out because your life has changed.
- Experiencing panic attacks.
- Wanting to talk about the loss but fearful of rejection.
- Wearing clothing or jewelry or keeping personal items of someone you lost.
- Feeling that the loneliness and aloneness you feel is more than you can bear.
- Noticing an increase in the use of alcohol or prescription drugs to numb the feeling of emptiness or pain.
- Finding yourself screaming for no apparent reason.
 - --Adapted from Teresa M. McIntier, CSJ, RN

Week 9: Handout B GRIEF CYCLE

The Kübler-Ross grief cycle

The Extended Grief Cycle

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross was a Swedish physician who spent a great deal of her practice serving the terminally ill and their families. She developed this description of grieving to help anyone who is dealing with loss understand their emotions and thoughts.



The initial state before the cycle is received is stable, at least in terms of the subsequent reaction on hearing the bad news. Compared with the ups and downs to come, even if there is some variation, this is indeed a stable state.

And then, into the calm of this relative paradise, a bombshell bursts...

- Shock stage*: Initial paralysis at hearing the bad news.
- Denial stage: Trying to avoid the inevitable.
- Anger stage: Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion.
- Bargaining stage: Seeking in vain for a way out.
- Depression stage: Final realization of the inevitable.
- Testing stage*: Seeking realistic solutions.
- Acceptance stage: Finally finding the way forward.

* This model is extended slightly from the original Kubler-Ross model, which does not explicitly include the Shock and Testing stages. These stages however are often helpful in understanding and facilitating change.

Getting stuck

A common problem with the above cycle is that people get stuck in one phase. Thus a person may become stuck in denial, never moving on from the position of not accepting the inevitable future. When it happens, they still keep on denying it, such as the person who has lost their job still going into the city only to sit on a park bench all day.

Likewise, a person may be stuck in permanent anger (which is itself a form of flight from reality) or repeated bargaining. It is more difficult to get stuck in active states than in passive states, and getting stuck in depression is perhaps the most common difficulty.

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<p style="text-align: center;">Week 9: Handout C HELPING YOURSELF THROUGH GRIEF</p>

Being gentle and accepting of your self is important in your grief process.

Be gentle with your self

Don't rush to "get over" your loss. Don't take on new responsibilities right away. Don't hold unrealistic expectations about how your life will go from now on. Be patient—healing takes time.

Accept your feelings

Allow yourself to feel the emotions that come up...it's okay to cry, to feel angry, to be depressed. It's even okay to feel a sense of relief. These feelings may come and go but just allow them to be.

Identify your support system

Finding people who are supportive can be a comfort. Calling on them (whether they are family, friends, a support group, clergy or a therapist) is a step toward caring for you. Make use of the helping systems and those you trust.

Be attentive to your physical needs

Be sure that your body is nurtured by getting the balanced meals you need, adequate sleep and exercise each day. Don't punish yourself if you miss a day, but do remember that your emotions are affected by your physical well-being.

Avoid alcohol and drugs

Using substances excessively or as a crutch only prolongs, delays, and complicates your grief.

Be attentive to your emotional needs

Acknowledge and applaud yourself for making it through each day. Discover simple things you can do to nurture yourself, like a bubble bath, or sitting and watching the sunset.

Give yourself permission to change your routine

Although major life changes should be avoided for a time, giving yourself permission to change little reminders of your lost relationship...changing the way

furniture is arranged or schedules of meals and bedtime...can aid in your grief process.

Keep a journal

As a measure of change and healing, use a journal to express your feelings in writing or with simple art. At various times, re-read portions that you choose. This can help give you a broader perspective on your healing process. A journal can also be a safe place to vent painful emotions in a non-threatening manner.

Identify your trouble spots

Birthdays, anniversaries, and special holidays or even certain times of ordinary days, may be difficult to get through. Special places may also be uncomfortable reminders for you. Knowing what times or places create discomfort allows you to plan ahead to deal with them. Acknowledging these trouble spots is easier than trying to pretend the hurt isn't there.

Begin building toward a fulfilling future

Renew old friendships; strengthen family bonds; plan new interests. Take a class about something you're curious to learn, or join a group connected to special interests. Rediscover old interests and activities. Plan things you enjoy, like a lunch with a good friend or taking even a short trip. When you are ready, consider volunteering some time to help others. Create goals and meaning for your life.