

Take Your Time with Grief

Suffering a major loss can have a big impact on your life. When a loved one has passed away or we've lost something important in our life, accepting and coping with the loss is one of the hardest journeys we can take.

Early on, grief can bring on physical effects such as body aches, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite and more. Then there are the "stages" of grief that most people go through as they process their loss. No two people work through grief in the same way. Many factors influence how we grieve, for how long, and how intensely.

In this edition of *Your Source* we look at a challenge that, unfortunately, everyone will go through at some point in life. We'll examine:

- Different types of grief, and how long a period of mourning might last.
- How most people travel the long road of grief including the stages of grieving.
- Ways to respond when grief affects the workplace.

Although the path through grief can feel painful and confusing, you don't have to walk it alone. Sharing your feelings with friends and family, and reaching out for expert guidance when needed, will help you heal in time.

Go online today! Log on to access *Coping with Loss* under the Library/In the Spotlight section. Resources are available to help you through one of the greatest challenges in life.

Types of Loss

Suffering after the death of a loved one is the most obvious form of mourning. But actually, people can mourn the loss of many things beyond a loved one's passing:

- The end of a long-term relationship
- The loss of a job or planned career path
- Deterioration in our health or the onset of a threatening medical diagnosis
- The loss of something valued, such as a home via natural disaster or financial problems
- Unexpected changes in our families or lives
- The prolonged absence of a loved one

The experience of mourning can follow different timelines and take different forms.

- Mourning can begin in anticipation of a loss that's about to happen.
- Grief can appear during or soon after a loss.
- Grief can sometimes get delayed, and not be fully experienced until years later.
- There is no right or wrong way to react to a great loss.

- Everyone copes differently – according to their own personalities and coping styles.
- Some grieve for a few weeks, some for a month or many months, and some don't fully work through their grief for several years.

Along the Winding Road of Grief

Working through grief can be a long and lonely road. Grief can be the deepest kind of suffering. Often brought on by terrible loss or disaster, grieving is a normal though painful part of living.

More than 40 years ago, Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross outlined a model of the grieving process that many people undergo. It involves some or all of five stages. Not everyone goes through these stages in the same order. But the stages seem common to many grief experiences.

- **Denial.** Refusing to admit that a great loss has occurred is often a first line of defense. Disbelief and numbness are common. During this time, surround yourself with friends and family who care about you.
- **Anger.** At this stage, grieving people look for someone or something to blame. They may blame other people or themselves. It's good to express your negative emotions and work through these feelings.
- **Bargaining.** People may use this stage to "cut a deal" such as, "I'll give my life savings if..." We may bargain with God, fate, doctors or whomever we think might be able to change the outcome of our loss.
- **Depression.** At some point the defenses used in earlier stages no longer shield people's feelings. Then they begin to carry the full weight of grief and become very sad. This is normal, and it shows you've begun to heal.
- **Acceptance.** By this final stage, people may be able to come to terms with their loss. Now they can begin to forgive themselves and anyone else they may have "blamed" for the loss.

Sometimes people go through the stages in a different order. Or they may experience certain stages more than once. *This is important: There's no need to rush grieving.* If you are struggling with grief and could use coping strategies, your program can help.

Now That's An Idea!

When a Coworker is Grieving

Death is an uncomfortable subject for some people. Knowing the right thing to say when a coworker has suffered a loss can be difficult. Here are some tips.

- *Listen actively.* Say very little and let your colleague relate his or her story, as often as needed.
- *Take some kind of action.* Make a phone call, send a card, and/or help with practical matters.

- *Don't avoid the subject of the loss.* Talk about the loss with your coworker whenever he or she seems to want to.
- *Accept anger if it appears.* Recognize that the grieving person may still be angry and in disbelief.
- *Let them grieve in their own way.* Avoid giving advice or speaking in clichés. Everyone grieves differently. Be patient, and accept your coworker's ups and downs.
- *Help find support.* Remember that your coworker may become drained and need outside help or counseling support.