

LOSS & GRIEF



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Feelings of loss and grief can be experienced after we lose someone or something we care about like; the death of a loved one; loss of a relationship; loss of a pet; loss of a job; a change to your way of life; or loss of important possessions. Grief is a natural response to loss. The more significant the loss, the more intense the grief is likely to be.

Grief has no set pattern. Everyone experiences grief differently. Some people may grieve for weeks and months, while others may describe their grief lasting for years. Grief is expressed in many ways and it can affect every part of your life; your emotions, thoughts and behavior, beliefs, physical health, your sense of self and identity, and your relationships with others. Grief can leave you feeling sad, angry, anxious, shocked, regretful, relieved, overwhelmed, isolated, irritable or numb.

Anyone who has been at an event where I have spoken, would have heard me share the grief and loss I experienced when we lost our business and walked away from the farm and the loss of identity that I also experienced.

The death of my Mother, nearly 10 years ago, is another time where I experienced intense grief and loss, but is something that I have held very personal, its something I rarely speak much about, and never posted anything publicly on social media, marking anniversaries or birthdays. Her loss had a big a effect on me, is something I have dealt with in my own way, privately, but it is also something I haven't dealt with well at times.

The 9th of May would have been Mums 75th birthday, which was a day of many emotions, and July will mark the 10th anniversary of her death. I wanted to write this as a mark of respect to Mum, and also as part of my continuing healing process, hopefully shed some light on dealing with grief and loss.

Given the work I have done in drought and bushfire affected communities and now with the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, many people are experiencing grief and loss for a range of reasons including, the loss of freedoms we are accustomed, loss of a home, loss of employment or business, loss of income, dislocation from community, changes to lifestyle, separation from family and friends, and in some cases the death of loved ones as the result.

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book, **On Grief and Grieving**, gave insights into the universal process of how human beings grieve. Essentially, she provided a listing and explanation of the five common stages of grief.

These stages of grief are quite fluid and are in no real particular order. You can even experience stages multiple times through the process.

The 5 stages of grief are as follows

Denial

Denial is the intellectual and emotional rejection of something that is clear and obvious. Interestingly, denial is actually a much-needed fight or flight survival mechanism. Evolution has created in humans the ability to deny both physical and emotional pain for a short period of time in the service of self-preservation.

Anger

The feeling of anger is empowering. We move toward anger in an attempt to gain control over our fears. Rather than accepting and dealing with the problem, we turn hostile, blaming others, engaging in power struggles, externalizing the issue, and, sometimes, refusing to comply with the rules.

Bargaining

Bargaining occurs when denial breaks down and we start to acknowledge reality but we're not ready to give up the illusion that we still have control. Basically, we try to compromise to find an easier, less painful way out.

Despair

Despair and depression occur when reality fully sets in, when there is no more room for denial. There is a sense of hopelessness, a feeling that we are fully dis-empowered and all is lost. We engage in self-pity. We think that nothing can help now, despite evidence to the contrary. We rue the fact that our attempts at bargaining haven't worked.

Acceptance

Acceptance occurs when we finally acknowledge and surrender to the facts, whatever those facts happen to be. When we reach this stage, we can stop denying and fighting reality, and we can start dealing as effectively as we can with what has happened and what is happening.

Long-term or overwhelming grief can put your physical, mental and emotional health at risk.

Grief and depression are quite different but they can appear similar as they can both lead to feelings of intense sadness, insomnia, poor appetite and weight loss. Depression stands out from grief as being more persistent, with constant feelings of emptiness and despair and a difficulty feeling pleasure or joy over a longer term but there are strategies to help us heal and ways to help those around us that are struggling.

What you can do to help yourself :

- Don't be afraid to ask for help.

- Talk to friends and family about how you are feeling, or consider joining a support group.
- Take care of your physical health. Grieving can be exhausting, so it's important to eat a healthy diet, exercise and sleep.
- Manage stress – lighten your load by asking friends, family members or work colleagues to help you with some chores or commitments. Relaxation and gentle exercise can be helpful.
- Do things you enjoy, even if you don't really feel like doing them.

How to help a person who is experiencing grief and loss :

Many people do not know what to say or do when trying to comfort someone who is grieving. However, often it is the simple offer of love and support that is the most important.

- Ask how they're feeling. Each day can be different for someone who is grieving; take the time to listen and understand what they are going through.
- Talk about everyday life too. Their loss and grief does not have to be the focus of all your conversations.
- Ask them how you can help. A few home cooked meals, doing the shopping, or perhaps offering to go walking or do something enjoyable with them can all help someone through their grief.
- Encourage them to seek professional support if their grief does not seem to be easing over time.

If you notice that depression symptoms continue, or your grief begins to get in the way of how you live, work, share relationships or live day-to-day, then it's important to get support or professional help.

Lifeline 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au

Sources:

www.lifeline.org.au

www.beyondblue.org.au

www.psychologytoday.com