

The Ten Stages Of Grief And Guidelines To Healing Grief

The loss of a loved one, especially a partner in marriage that has lasted many years, will cause grief for the one who is now left alone.

We all need to understand the normal reactions that every human being has to such a situation.

Note the word “*normal*” for this needs to be in our mind in every response we have facing grief.

1 Shock – the first reaction is to be anaesthetised against the overwhelming loss.

Not comprehending the situation and not able to face the full magnitude of what has happened.

2 Emotional release – we begin to realise how dreadful the loss is.

At this stage it is far better to vent or release these feelings than to try and repress them.

3 Depression, loneliness and utter isolation – feelings of “*no-one can help me.*” Feeling down in depths of despair, prompted by expressed concern for the future.

We know this is normal but it still lays heavily on us.

4 Physical symptoms of distress – we can feel physically “*ill*” without the normal symptoms. **Not understanding this is a normal physical reaction to grief.**

5 Panic – convinced “*something is wrong with me*” as a person, we find we can concentrate on little else. May even in extreme cases that we are losing our mind.

The best help we can receive is to know that others have felt the same when facing grief.

6 Guilty feelings – we may recall our own past neglect, mistreatment or wrong we expressed to the deceased.

These “*wrongs*” may be imaginary or exaggerated.

If they are real wrongs with this being real guilt. Confession and unburdening on a trusted friend gives the best relief.

“*Forgiveness*” of real wrongs, as if they were imaginary, is **no** adequate solution.

7 Hostility – hostile expressions towards those we believe or imagine “*caused*” the loss is common.

Such hostility is normal but not to be encouraged.

8 Inability to renew normal activities – find it difficult to get back to “*business as usual*” in our day-to-day activities. We have to bear our loss alone in this way as others have returned to their normal activities. **So we will need encouragement to face the new reality, not to be sheltered from it.**

9 Gradual overcoming of grief – emotional balance returns little by little, **like the healing of a physical wound. This rate will vary with individuals.**

10 Re-adjustment to the new realities – not the “old self again,” because you are now in a new situation. **But you will be stronger for having faced and overcome this trial in your life.**

Simple guidelines for healing grief

1 Accept the grief – do not try to be “brave.”

Take time to cry.

This also applies for men, for strong men can and do cry.

2 Talk about it – share your grief within the family and close friends. Do not attempt to protect them by silence.

Find a friend to talk to who will listen without passing judgement.

If possible, find someone who has experienced a similar sorrow.

Talk often. If you are told to “*snap out of it*” find another person who will just listen and show you that they are listening.

3 Keep busy – do purposeful work that occupies the mind, but avoid frantic activity.

4 Take care of yourself – bereavement can be a threat to your health. At the moment you may feel you do not care, that will and must change as soon as possible.

You are important, your life is valuable, care for it, physically and mentally.

5 Eat well – at this time of emotional and physical depletion, your body needs good nourishment more than ever. If you can only “pick at your food,” a vitamin supplement might be helpful, but it will not fully make up for a poor diet.

6 Exercise regularly – return to your old programme or start one as soon as possible. Depression can be lightened a little by the biochemical changes brought by exercise, also you will sleep better.

7 Get rid of imagined guilt – you did the best you could at the time, all things considered. If you did make mistakes, learn to accept them.

Realise that no-one is perfect. Realise that only hindsight is 20-20.

If you are convinced that you have real guilt, consider professional or spiritual counselling.

If you believe in a Creator God, a pastor can help you believe also in God’s forgiveness.

8 Accept your understanding of death – you have probably asked “why” over and over and have finally realised that you will get no acceptable answer from most people.

Use what understanding you do have until you are helped to fully understand death and what there is beyond it.

[There are articles to help you on this website if you take time to download and study them with an open mind, please let us help you.]

9 Join a group of others who are sorrowing – your old circle of friends may change as a result of your bereavement, even if this does not happen you will need new friends who have been through your experience. Bereaved people sometimes form groups for friendship and sharing.

10 Associate with old friends – this may be difficult in certain activities as you now are without a partner, **but true friends will get over this.**

If and when you can, talk and act naturally without avoiding the subject of your loss.

11 Postpone major decisions – this is very important. For example, wait before deciding to sell your house and move or change your job if you are still working.

12 Record your thoughts in a journal – this will help you to get your feelings out and also record your progress in dealing with your loss and grief.

13 Turn grief into creative energy – find a way to help others.

Helping to carry someone else's load is guaranteed to lighten your own. Volunteer to help in the many organisations that need people but are unable to pay a wage, charity shops, soup kitchens, any group who are helping others in physical and emotional needs.

14 Take advantage of your religious affiliation – if you have one.

If you have been inactive in matters of Christian faith, this might be the time to become involved.

The Word of God, the Christian Bible, has much to say about death and sorrow that are very positive.

As time passes, you may find you are not so mad at God after all.

Please use articles on this website that open up the Word of God, the Christian Bible, for you to understand the real reason why you exist as a human being.

Remember, no matter how deep your sorrow, you are not alone. Others have been there and can help share your load if you let them.

Do not deny them the opportunity.