

Living through Loss Workshop Series

Healthy vs Unhealthy Grief

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What is Grief:

Grief is a normal and natural response to any loss.

Grief is a reaction to a variety of losses people suffer throughout their lives.

Grief is a paradoxical experience. In other words, you are doing your best healing when you feel the worst.

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People may grieve when they lose:

People- through a change in their relationship, a break up or a death.

Their health- as a result of illness, disability or an accident.

Things that they own- by accident, theft, change in circumstances.

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People may grieve when they lose:

Places- through moving house.

Their place in the world-their job, team or social involvement or when they themselves have changed.

Pets- through death or because of a move.

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Healthy Grief:

Sometimes referred to as normal or functional grief, healthy grief has a function. It allows survivors to identify, acknowledge, feel and integrate what they love but are now without.

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Behavioral Reactions Associated with Grief:

- Detachment from family and friends.
- Changes in interests and activities.
- Decreased socialization.
- Loss of joy (anhedonia).

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Behavioral Reactions Associated with Grief:

- Withdrawn/less productive.
- Unable to sit still.
- Seeing or hearing the voice of the deceased.
- Struggling to think clearly.

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Behavioral Reactions Associated with Grief:

- Treasuring objects of the deceased.
- Sighing.
- Anger/general irritability.
- Loneliness.

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Cognitive Reactions Associated with Grief:

- Lack of concentration.
- Difficulty in making decisions.
- Lack of focus.
- Short term memory problems.

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Cognitive Reactions Associated with Grief:

- Disbelief.
- Excessive worry.
- Feeling overwhelmed.

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Emotional Reactions Associated with Grief:

- Numbness.
- Apathy/indifference.
- Fear.
- Mood swings.

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Emotional Reactions Associated with Grief:

- Disbelief.
- Griefbursts.
- Guilt/Regrets.
- Resentment.

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Physical Reactions Associated with Grief:

- Difficulty in falling asleep.
- Early morning wakening.
- Increase/decrease in appetite.
- Fatigue/lack of energy.

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Physical Reactions Associated with Grief:

- Slowed movement.
- Dry mouth.
- Irregular heartbeat/palpitations.
- Restlessness.

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Spiritual Reactions Associated with Grief:

- Lack of meaning.
- Questioning faith/religious affiliation.
- Blaming God.
- Desire to join the deceased.

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The Needs of Mourning:

- Acknowledge the reality of the death.
- Feel the pain.
- Change the relationship from one of physical presence to one of memory
- Adjust your self-identity.

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Common Feelings Associated with Grief:

Anger, anxiety, confusion, depression, despair, disappointment, exhaustion, fear, guilt, hopelessness, loneliness, numbness, regret, relief.

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Your experience of grief will inevitably be shaped by some or all of the following: your relationship with the person who died, the circumstances surrounding the death, the funeral experience, the people in your life, your unique personality, your culture, your gender, past experiences with death and loss, your own health, your spirituality.

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Grieving is as natural as crying when you are hurt, sleeping when you are tired, eating when you are hungry, or sneezing when your nose itches. It's nature's way of healing a broken heart. Don't let anyone take your grief away from you. You deserve it and you must have it. If you had major surgery, no one would pressure you to run a marathon the next week. Grief is a major wound. It does not heal overnight.

Doug Manning

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Unhealthy Grief Terminology:

Unhealthy grief prolongs suffering, interrupts normal activities, or prevents life from being lived to the fullest.

The following are some of the terms used when development is hindered:

abnormal, chronic, complex, complicated, conflicted, dysfunctional, impaired, pathological, problematic, prolonged, unhealthy, unresolved.

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Basic Reasons for Failing to Grieve:

- The person is unable to tolerate the pain of grief.
- The person has an excessive need to maintain interaction with the person who died.
- Guilt- reviewing the relationship with the person who died brings up guilt.

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Basic Reasons for Failing to Grieve:

- Grief is avoided because it means acknowledging the loss of a part of self.
- Reawakening of an old loss.
- The bereaved person can't handle the overwhelming feelings or anger, frustration, depression and anxiety.
- Multiple losses

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Basic Reasons for Failing to Grieve:

- A belief that grieving equals weakness.
- A belief that once crying starts it will never stop.
- A belief that letting go of the pain equals letting go of the loved one

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Absent Grief:

- Absent grief is when you don't really feel that different than before the loss. You seem to avoid sadness even when you are alone. Grief is usually suppressed.
- Initially after a death, we often go numb for a short time and have little reaction. That is normal.

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Delayed Grief:

- Delayed grief is the pushing aside of feelings at the critical early period of mourning to be dealt with in the future.
- Delayed grief will erupt at some later time and always leaves us open to unexpected emotional explosions.

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Denial/Avoidance:

- Some denial is natural in the process of getting use to the loss, but denial as an ongoing mechanism for coping is unhealthy.
- Avoidance is the idea that a person will not deal with a situation. Grief avoidance is a mechanism that keeps one from getting in touch with his or her true and honest feelings.

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Prolonged Grief:

Sometimes referred to as exaggerated bereavement, prolonged grief remains prominent in people's lives years beyond the loss. Most likely, you have not let go of the person who died or left. And there may be some things you wish you had said to them. You may be "stuck."

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Unanticipated / Sudden Grief:

Occurs after sudden loss and is so disruptive that recovery is usually complicated. When a death takes place without warning, sudden grief can lead to exaggerated reactions and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

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What Society Needs to Realize:

- There are thousands of individual differences in grieving.
- Some people do well without grief work.
- Continuing bonds with the deceased are normal.
- For many people, grief reactions never entirely go away.

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What Society Needs to Realize:

Sometimes society doesn't always know what to say. Understand that sometimes, saying nothing is best.

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Moving Toward Healing:

- You are emotionally available to yourself.
- You are present and “in the moment.”
- You have the ability to be patient with yourself.
- You have the ability to maintain a positive attitude.

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Moving Toward Healing:

- You realize life is worth living and loving.
- You give yourself permission to feel whatever you feel.
- You allow for moments of joy, as well as sadness.
- You welcome the return of energy and love of life.

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