



GRIEF AND GRIEF REACTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

- Grief is a subjective state of emotional, physical and social responses to the loss of a valued entity. The loss may be real e.g. death of a loved one, loss of personal possessions or it may be perceived by the individual alone, unable to be shared by others or identified by others.
- However, grief can be expressed by people very differently. Some people do not experience an intense reaction. Most people experience fluctuating reactions for a period of time while others can develop a complex grief reaction.

DEFINITION

- Grief is a “set of cognitive, emotional and social difficulties that follow the death of a loved one.
- Grief is a series of intense physical and psychological responses that occurs following loss.
- It is a normal, natural, necessary, and adaptive response to a loss.

Functions of grief

- To make the outer reality of the loss in to an internally accepted reality
- To lessen the emotional attachment to the lost person or object
- To make it possible for the bereaved person to become attached to other people or objects.

STAGES OF GRIEF

- **Kubler-Ross**, in extensive research with terminally ill patients, identified five stages of feelings and behaviours that individuals experience in response to a real, perceived or anticipated loss.

1 - Denial

Denial is a conscious or unconscious refusal to accept facts, information, reality, etc., relating to the situation concerned. It's a defence mechanism and perfectly natural. Some people can become locked in this stage when dealing with a traumatic change that can be ignored.

2 – Anger

Anger can manifest in different ways. People dealing with emotional upset can be angry with themselves, and/or with others, especially those close to them. “Why me?” and “It’s not fair!” are comments often expressed during anger stage.

3 – Bargaining

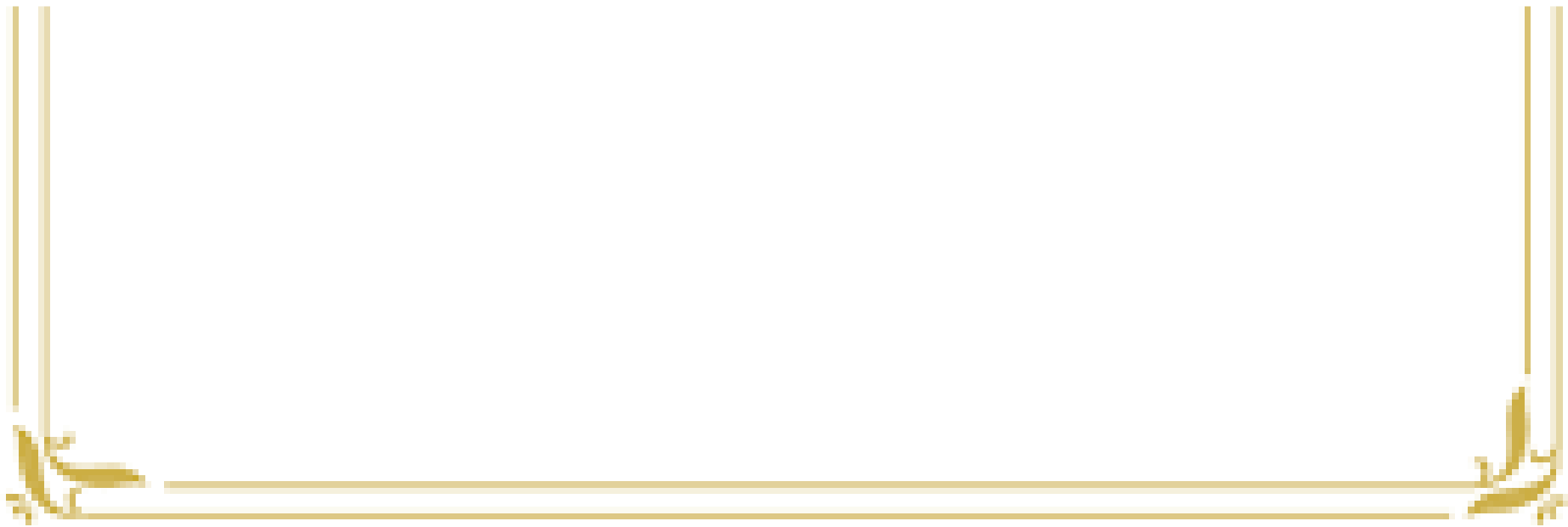
Traditionally the bargaining stage for people facing death can involve attempting to bargain with whatever God the person believes in. For example "Can we still be friends?.." when facing a break-up. Bargaining rarely provides a sustainable solution, especially if it's a matter of life or death.

4 – Depression

During this stage, the full impact of the loss is experienced. The sense of loss is intense and feelings of sadness and depression prevail. This is a time of quiet desperation and disengagement from all association with the lost entity.

5 – Acceptance

The final stage brings a feeling of peace regarding the loss that has occurred. It is a time of quiet expectation and resignation. The focus is on the reality of the loss and its meaning for the individuals affected by it.



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- All individuals do not experience each of these stages in response to a loss, nor do they necessarily experience them in this order. Some individuals' grieving behaviours may fluctuate, and even overlap, between stages.

STAGE MODEL OF GRIEF

According to stage model of grief, there are 7 stages of grief:-

1. SHOCK & DENIAL

People may deny the reality of the loss at some level, in order to avoid the pain. Shock provides emotional protection from being overwhelmed all at once. This may last for weeks.

2. PAIN & GUILT

As the shock wears off, it is replaced with the suffering of unbelievable pain. Although excruciating and almost unbearable, it is important that you experience the pain fully, and not hide it, avoids it or escapes from it with alcohol or drugs. Person may have guilty feelings over things you did or didn't do with your loved one. Life feels chaotic and scary during this phase.

3. ANGER & BARGAINING

Frustration gives way to anger, and person may lash out and lay unwarranted blame for the death on someone else.

Person may rail against fate, questioning "Why me?" He may also try to bargain in vain with the powers that be for a way out of your despair ("I will never drink again if you just bring him back")

4. "DEPRESSION", REFLECTION, LONELINESS

This is a normal stage of grief, so do not be "talked out of it" by well-meaning outsiders. Encouragement from others is not helpful to you during this stage of grieving.

During this time, you finally realize the true magnitude of your loss, and it depresses you. You may isolate yourself on purpose, reflect on things you did with your lost one, and focus on memories of the past.

THE UPWARD TURN

- As you start to adjust to life without your dear one, your life becomes a little calmer and more organized. Your physical symptoms lessen, and your "depression" begins to lift slightly.

6. RECONSTRUCTION & WORKING THROUGH

- As you become more functional, your mind starts working again, and you will find yourself seeking realistic solutions to problems posed by life without your loved one. You will start to work on practical and financial problems and reconstructing yourself and your life without him or her.

7. ACCEPTANCE & HOPE

During this, the last of the seven stages in this grief model, you learn to accept and deal with the reality of your situation. Acceptance does not necessarily mean instant happiness. Given the pain and turmoil you have experienced, you can never return to the carefree, untroubled YOU that existed before this tragedy. But you will find a way forward.

TYPES OF GRIEF

- **ANTICIPATORY GRIEF**
- **NORMAL OR COMMON GRIEF**
- **COMPLICATED GRIEF**
- **DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF**

ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Anticipatory grief has been defined as "the total set of cognitive, affective, cultural, and social reactions to expected death felt by the patient and family."

The following aspects of anticipatory grief have been identified among survivors:

- Depression.
- Heightened concern for the dying person.
- Attempts to adjust to the consequences of the death.

- Anticipatory grief provides family members with time to gradually absorb the reality of the loss. Individuals are able to complete unfinished business with the dying person (e.g., saying "good-bye," "I love you," or "I forgive you").

NORMAL OR COMMON GRIEF

- In general, normal or common grief reactions are marked by a gradual movement toward an acceptance of the loss and, although daily functioning can be very difficult, managing to continue with basic daily activities.
- Normal grief usually includes some common emotional reactions that include emotional numbness, shock, disbelief, and/or denial often occurring immediately after the death, particularly if the death is unexpected.

- Normal or common grief appears to occur in 50% to 85% of persons following a loss, is time-limited, begins soon after a loss, and largely resolves within the first year or two.

COMPLICATED GRIEF

These patterns are described in comparison to normal grief and highlight variations from the normal pattern. They include descriptive labels such as the following:

- **Inhibited or absent grief:** A pattern in which persons show little evidence of the expected separation distress, seeking, yearning, or other characteristics of normal grief.
- **Delayed grief:** A pattern in which symptoms of distress, seeking, yearning, etc., occur at a much later time than is typical.
- **Chronic grief:** A pattern emphasizing prolonged duration of grief symptoms.
- **Distorted grief:** A pattern characterized by extremely intense or atypical symptoms.

DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF

- Disenfranchised grief is a term describing grief that is not acknowledged by society.
- Examples of events leading to disenfranchised grief are the loss of a pet, a trauma in the family a generation prior, the loss of a home or place of residence. Disenfranchised grief is grief others don't recognise. Disenfranchised grief may be the death of a secret partner or a pet or a miscarriage.

COMMON GRIEF REACTIONS

- A grief reaction is a set of psychological and somatic (body) symptoms that results from extreme sorrow or loss. These reactions fall into four different categories:-
- Thought Patterns
- Physical Sensations
- Emotions
- Behaviours.

THOUGHT PATTERNS

- **Disbelief-** This is often our first thought upon hearing of a death, especially if the death was sudden.
- **Confusion** - This manifests as having trouble concentrating, being forgetful, experiencing confused thinking.
- **Preoccupation** - We may spend lots of time thinking about the deceased or obsessing about their suffering and dying.
- **Sense of the Deceased's Presence** - This is most likely to happen shortly after the death.
- **Hallucinations** - It is a fairly common and normal symptom of bereavement to see or hear a loved one, usually within a few weeks after the death.

PHYSICAL SENSATIONS

- Tightness in the forehead, throat, or chest
- Dry mouth
- Breathlessness
- Nausea and/or a hollow feeling in the stomach
- Hypersensitivity to noise
- Lack of energy, weakness
- Sense of depersonalization

EMOTIONS

- **Shock** - This occurs most often in the case of a sudden death, but may also occur after an expected death.
- **Numbness** - This is commonly experienced early in the grieving process
- **Sadness** - This is the most familiar reaction to grief
- **Irritability and Anger** - This anger comes from two sources. First, we feel frustrated that we couldn't prevent the death. Second, it is a normal regressive experience to feel anger at the person that "abandoned" us. It is very common to displace anger onto another target, such as paramedics or other health care personnel. If anger is turned inward toward ourselves, it may develop into suicidal behaviour.

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- **Guilt** - Guilt is a very common symptom of bereavement, particularly in the case of a suicide.
- **Anxiety**- This can range from a light sense of insecurity to a strong panic attack. The sources for this anxiety are the fear that we won't be able to take care of ourselves on our own and a heightened sense of our own mortality.
- **Loneliness**-This is particularly a problem for surviving spouses or in other close day-to-day relationships.
- **Fatigue**- Grief is emotionally exhausting. This fatigue can be surprising and distressing to an active person.

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- **Helplessness** - The stress of bereavement is heightened by the fact that there is nothing we can do to reverse the death.
- **Yearning** - Missing the deceased is a normal response to loss.
- **Emancipation** - This is a positive feeling that may come after a death, particularly in a difficult or highly conflicted relationship.
- **Relief** - Many people feel relief after the death of a loved one, particularly if the loved one suffered during a lengthy illness.

BEHAVIOURS

- **Sleep Disturbances** -They may sometimes require medical intervention, but in normal grief they usually correct themselves. They can sometimes symbolize various fears, such as the fear of dreaming, the fear of being in bed alone, and the fear of not awakening.
- **Appetite Disturbances-** Loss of appetite is more common
- **Absent-Minded Behaviour** - This can be dangerous if, for example, we are not paying attention while crossing the street or driving.
- **Social Withdrawal** - This is usually short-lived and corrects itself. It can also include a loss of interest in the outside world, such as giving up TV and newspapers.

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- **Dreams of the Deceased** - Both dreams and nightmares are very common
- **Avoiding Reminders of the Deceased** - We may avoid places or things that trigger painful feelings of grief. When we get rid of belongings right away, it can lead to complicated bereavement.
- **Visiting Places or Carrying Objects that Remind Us of the Deceased** - Often we have an underlying fear of losing memories of the deceased.
- **Crying** - There is potential healing value in crying, because our tears release mood altering chemicals.
- **Searching or Calling Out for the Deceased**
- **Restless Over activity.**

GRIEF REACTIONS OVER THE LIFE SPAN

The child, 3-5 years old:

A child of this age is egocentric (child focused), believing that the world revolves around them. The death of a loved one will be very self-focused, where the child believes that s/he is responsible for the death. They might feel abandoned and the grief of losing a loved one as part of a disaster or crisis event may interrupt age appropriate activities and force a child to address issues for which the child is not developmentally prepared. Emotions presented can vary greatly, from sadness, anger, anxiety, and guilt.

Factors affecting grief

- Developmental considerations
- Religious cultural beliefs
- Relationship with the lost object
- Cause of death

How Long Does Grief Last?

- The length of the grief process is different for everyone. There is no predictable schedule for grief.
- The grief process cannot be rushed even though it can be quite painful at times.
- It is normal for significant dates, holidays, or other reminders to trigger feelings related to the loss.

Does grief affect people differently?

- Different cultures and religions see death, loss and grief in different ways.
- Expression of grief and the meaning to loss will be based on our own beliefs and view of the world.

The child, 6-12 years old:

- School age children at this stage learn basic skills, but attach their cultural values to it. Death of a loved one during a disaster or crisis event can result in a child not wanting to leave home, hoping to reassure the safety of others. For the school aged child, like the younger child, grief crisis may interrupt age appropriate activities and force a child to address issues for which the child is not developmentally prepared. Children this age might believe that certain behaviour will bring their loved ones back. They might be preoccupied with fear. They might also experience sadness, anger, anxiety and guilt.

The adolescent, 13-19 years old:

- Adolescents often deal with self-esteem and identity issues. They want to differentiate from their parents. If they lose a loved one during a disaster or crisis event, they might feel guilty because of what they might have said to the person before they died. Adolescents just like the young and the school aged child who experiencing this kind of loss during a disaster or crisis event may experience an interruption of age-appropriate activities. Adolescents often express their grief and loss issues through their body language and acting out behaviour. In addition, adolescents might be internally preoccupied with death, which might be manifested through poor school performance.

The young adult, 20-40 years old:

- Young adults can be devastated by the death of a loved one during a disaster or crisis event. For example, losing one's child can be paralyzing for parents. The parents might blame themselves for not protecting their child better during the disaster or crisis event. Their emotions might range greatly and include such things as loneliness, sadness, disbelief, anger, anxiety, etc. Young adults losing a spouse or partner might feel emptiness and isolation and their social connections might change as they are no longer a couple but an individual. Losing a spouse or partner at this age means not only grieving, but assuming the (often unfamiliar) responsibilities and roles of the deceased and may include helping children through grief.

The middle aged adults, 40-60 years old:

- Middle aged adults, similar to young adults, can be badly impacted by the sudden loss of a loved one during a disaster or crisis event. They might grieve the loss of their children and potential future grandchildren. They might feel guilty for not having been able to protect their children. Losing a spouse or partner during a disaster or crisis event can leave middle aged adults with (often unfamiliar) responsibilities and roles, experiencing financial hardship, and/or dealing with grieving children. Middle aged adults might grieve future plans for retiring together.

The elderly adult, 60 plus years:

- Elderly adults, often have experienced multiple losses, such as jobs, health, independence, social roles, familiar living surroundings, and loved ones. Although loss is often expected during this age, unexpected losses of children and/or spouses or partners during a disaster or crisis event can be detrimental, since children are often also caregivers. Loss of a spouse or partner might result in feeling more dependent on others. Often the elderly adult lacks the social support needed, which can be detrimental during this time.

How to Cope with Grief?

- Some ways of coping with grief are helpful, like talking to others, writing in a journal, and so forth. Others may be hurtful or destructive to the healing process, like substance abuse or isolation.
- Healthy coping skills are important in resolving a loss. They cannot take away our feelings of loss. They can, however, help to move forward in the healing process.

How Can You Support Others Who Are Grieving?

Soon after the loss, social activities and support from others may decrease. As the shock of the loss fades, there is a tendency on the part of the griever to feel more pain and sadness.

How Can You Support Others Who Are Grieving?

- Be a good listener
- Ask about their feelings
- Sit with them
- Share your feelings
- Ask about their loss
- Make telephone calls
- Acknowledge the pain
- Let them feel sad
- Be available when we can
- Do not minimize grief

What are some strategies to cope with grief after the loss of a loved one?

- Self-expression
- Physical self-care
- Emotional self-care
- Good social support
- Emotional discharge
- Seeking social support
- Cognitive redefinition
- Defense mechanism

How to Cope with Grief-key points

- Seek counseling
- Engage in social activities
- Exercise
- Good nutrition
- Seek spiritual support
- Take time to relax
- Join a support group
- Listen to music
- Be patient
- Let feel grief

