

## GRIEF/LOSS ISSUES FOLLOWING DEATH/SIGNIFICANT LOSS

Daniel G. Bagby/BTSR

There are several grief responses to the loss of a loved one, and each person grieves in their own way (we tend to express our grief as our families did). Grief can be anticipated, arrested or delayed. Grief also occurs in major changes: miscarriage, divorce, job loss, isolation, moving, retirement, etc:

Shock: The stunning reaction to the news of a sudden loss leaves us in disbelief; we say little, express little, feel little, appear dazed, disoriented. Denial may set in for a while (“it didn’t really happen--it’s a bad dream”)

Numbness: We go through the routine of necessary chores, mechanically doing what we have to do; feeling is distant; there is a protective “anesthesia” to our pain and loss

Flow of emotions: We eventually “let go,” cry, and release stored-up feelings. The tears may come unexpectedly, and for long periods of time. Weeping may surprise us by its suddenness--or length.

Depression: Feelings and emotions are often internalized as a “flat” feeling and depression, a listless and dreary sense, and a withdrawal into private pain (and often very negative “internal” conversation)

Bouts with Anger, Guilt, Shame: Normal reactions to loss next involve struggles with anger (at ourselves if we think we could have prevented it/at others, for unrealistic expectations about their actions/at God, for allowing the death). Guilt usually focuses on things we did, did not do, said or did not say, as lack of control and lack of closure haunt us; shame often prevails in families after suicide--as if they could have prevented it.

Stabbing memories: Unpredictable moments of sudden “flashback” returns to the memory of a conversation, an event, a gesture, a habit, an experience shared with the deceased/lost relationship; flow of strong emotions, heavy “emptiness”

Selective reflections: Quiet, difficult moments when we tend to “go back” and reflect on either all the “bad” memories, or only the “good” memories, so that we dwell on what seems unresolved or unforgiven in the wake of the sudden interruption of contact (and death) of the person. Idolatry can set in (“everything they did was right,” “they were perfect”, etc)

Return to a routine: We take up our schedule and our daily routine, doing what has to be done, with little joy or excitement, but performing required tasks and necessary behaviors “to keep going”; feelings are “flat” and joy is rare.

Recovery of hope and joy: Tears & depression fade slowly; interest and commitment for new develop emerges--like healing a wound (over a year).

Resources: Daniel G. Bagby, *Seeing Through Our Tears*. Granger Westberg, *Good Grief*. Roslyn Karaban, *Complicated Losses, Difficult Deaths*. Doug Manning, *Don't Take My Grief Away*. Kenneth Doka, *Living With Grief After Sudden Loss*.

## MOST COMMON MYTHS IN REGARD TO GRIEF/LOSS/RECOVERY

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1. If I don't bring it up, they won't hurt.  
(they are already hurting)
2. People who grieve want me to "fix" their pain  
(grieving people need acknowledgment)
3. The best way to deal with loss is to "move on"  
(grief takes its own time)
4. Grief anger is bad for people  
(anger can be a form of care)
5. If people don't show emotion, they're "over it"  
(some people are private, some delay grief)
6. People of strong faith don't grieve deeply  
(loss-pain is a sign of love)
7. Most people know when they are grieving  
(many folks are unaware of effect of loss)
8. People who grieve need much verbal reassurance  
(listen more/talk less)
9. Recurring memories indicate no progress  
(returning memories are normal process)
10. Grieving people understand depression, guilt, numbness  
(most grievers know little about loss)
11. Suicide loss is best not talked about with family  
(survivors struggle with guilt, shame, anger)
12. Extended grief is a measure of love  
(grief, when "stuck," can be a form of idolatry)

## **THE COMPLEXITY OF HUMAN LOSS/ CHALLENGE OF MULTIPLE GRIEF** Daniel G. Bagby/ BTSR

### **HUMAN BEINGS EXPERIENCE LOSS IN A VARIETY OF WAYS:**

- 1) Material loss: Important objects
- 2) Relationship loss: Important people
- 3) Intrapsychic loss: The struggle with mental / chemical changes
- 4) Functional loss: Diminished use of certain skills
- 5) Role loss: An altered definition of self/ perception
- 6) Systemic loss: Significant change in community/network

### **WE PROCESS LOSS AND CHANGE IN DIFFERENT WAYS:**

Anticipate / Delay/ Arrest / = Grief Experiences

### **DIMENSIONS OF LOSS**

- 1) Ambiguous losses: Alzheimer's / Divorce / Miscarriage
- 2) Disenfranchised losses: AIDS / Abortion / Suicide
- 3) Unacknowledged loss: Mental illness / Job loss / Rape
- 4) Unanticipated loss: Accident / Homicide / Status
- 5) Lingering loss: MS / Cancer / Disabling loss

### **GRIEF DEPRESSION**

- 1) Bouts with low self-esteem
- 2) Guilt
- 3) Control issues
- 4) Anger
- 5) Loss of focus & will
- 6) Limited interest, little joy, flatness of affect

### **Resources:**

Daniel G. Bagby, *Seeing Through Our Tears*. Kenneth Doka, *Living With Grief After Sudden Death*. Roslyn Karaban, *Complicated Losses, Difficult Deaths*. Mitchell and Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*.

