

## **LOSS AND GRIEF**

Each individual had lost or will lose someone. Although this is known and sometimes even one can be prepared for this, when a person loses someone his/her emotional balance gets shaken and it is hard to cope with.

Grief is normal process that is experienced after the death of a beloved one or end of a significant relationship. When this process is gone through naturally, the person copes with the loss in a healthy way and becomes stronger.

By the end of the grieving period, people learn to live with the loss by making it a part of their lives. This does not mean forgetting the beloved one or not loving him/her anymore. It just makes it possible to accept the loss and your feelings about it, and move on with your own life.

Although it is normal and natural, the process of grieving is quite hard and requires time, courage and support.

### **Grief Reactions:**

Each person gives very different emotional, physical and behavioral reactions. The intensity of these reactions depends on the incidence.

**Emotional:** Shock, sadness, anger, guilt, blame, anxiety, fear, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, numbness, reluctance, hopelessness, freedom.

**Physical:** Emptiness in stomach, tightness at heart and throat, sensitivity to noise, inability to feel oneself, shortness of breath, feeling weak, dry mouth.

**Mental:** Disbelief, messy/complicated thoughts, distorted/mistaken thoughts, hallucinations, concentration difficulties, forgetting, disturbing thoughts or dreams.

**Behavioral:** Sleep and eating disorders, careless or obsessive behaviors, using alcohol or other substances, avoiding or inability to be off the social environments and stimuli that reminds the lost person, exploring/calling the lost one back.

### **Grief process:**

1. Disbelief and denial: Acting as nothing has happened.
2. Shock and numbness: This is experienced at early times when the loss happened/learned, and the person rejects the reality for a short time.
3. Bargaining: The loss is denied and the lost one is desired and expected to come back. Anger is a very important part of this process.
4. Helplessness: Guilt due to inability to prevent the loss is an important element. The anxiety causes difficulties at work and in social relationships.
5. Recovery/revival of behaviors and life: Functions of life are arranged, and new relationships and projects are invested in.

It is important to accept the reality of loss, suffer the pain and grieve, adapt to a world without the lost one and invest in the other parts of life, so that one can have a relief from pain and move on.

These may seem impossible to happen, but remember that loss is a natural part of life and grief is our natural reaction to this. There is a saying that is a cliché but still true: Time heals the wounds.

### **Suggestions to cope with this process in a more healthy way:**

- Talk to someone who will listen to and understand you well. You don't have to bear this alone. Tell everything you are going through to someone you trust. If you have lost someone from family, each of you may react differently and it may be hard to share your feelings with family members. Don't be afraid of making them more sad or looking weak. Talking, remembering and sharing will help all of you. Your friends may give support, too. Do not move away from them.
- Talk to someone who had experienced loss before. This will relieve both you and him/her.
- Try to accept your feelings and reactions. Express them when possible. Because, they are quite normal. Allow yourself to grieve, do not prevent it.
- Accept that grief is a long process, don't rush to wipe everything away immediately, but also don't think that this will

never end. Be patient. Don't lose your hope.

- Do not avoid crying. Don't care about the comments that "You have to be strong", "How strong s/he is, s/he never cried". Crying is natural and it gives relief.
- Special days such as anniversaries, birthdays and feasts may be hard for you. Be prepared for this.
- Forgive yourself for the things you had and hadn't done.
- Funeral, prayer or visiting the cemetery may be difficult but they make you experience and express your pain. It may also help to see that other people are there to support you, you are not alone and life is going on.
- Do not retreat from social activities.
- Listen to music, read books and take walks as much as you can.
- Gradually go back to your normal activities such as school, work, etc. If you have difficulty, prepare a program and follow it.
- It is very important to take care of physical needs (sleep, eating and health). Do not neglect them.
- Expressing your feelings by writing or painting may also help.

#### **Avoid doing things that may complicate grief:**

- Do not use alcohol or other substances in order to deal with pain.
- Accept that there are ups and downs; do not blame yourself for the downs.
- Do not minimize or ignore your feelings.
- Do not tire yourself by work or school in order to forget.
- Do not get angry with people who are trying to help you.

#### **When does grief become a problem?**

Sometimes deteriorations in sleep and appetite, enduring thoughts about the person we have lost, sadness and hopelessness may make it very difficult for us to overcome. Sometimes we make think about ending our lives in order to end the pain. At some other times we may feel disturbed about behaving very cheerful and inappropriate on the contrary to our feelings. When these are the cases, professional help is required. If your disturbance affects the maintenance of your daily life, get help indeed.

#### **How can you help someone who has experienced a loss?**

- Do not distance from him/her, even if you are feeling fear, discomfort and uncertainty. Be with him/her at the funeral, make a phone call after the funeral, and/or write letters. Don't take your support away.
- Don't say "If there is something I can do..." Think about it and do it.
- Don't try to change the subject when the person is talking about loss and don't judge him/her. Be a good listener. Talk openly about the loss, unless you are particularly asked not to. Show that you care, share your feelings and talk about any similar experience you may have had. However, avoid using the phrase "I know how you feel."
- Don't talk about the positive consequences of loss. Do not compare his/her experiences with someone else's.
- Don't take his/her rejection of your help as a personal attack and do not get angry.
- Be patient; allow him/her to go through the grief as long as s/he wants.
- Help the person to take good care of him/her. Don't allow him/her to neglect physical needs and avoid getting back into normal activities.
- Serve as a model by maintaining your positive attitude.
- Try not to minimize his/her feelings.

**Loss is an inevitable and difficult part our lives. However with time, patience and support, we can complete the grief process by gaining a new perspective about ourselves, people and life.**

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#### **For More Information**

Psychological Counselling Department

(The services are available only to the students and staff of İstanbul Bilgi University.)

e-mail: [psycounselling@bilgi.edu.tr](mailto:psycounselling@bilgi.edu.tr)

#### **Kustepe Campus**

Tel: 0212 311 63 61/ 6470 / 6252

#### **Dolapdere Campus**

Tel: 0212 311 5212

**santralistanbul**

Tel: 0212 311 7671

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