

Cedarwood School

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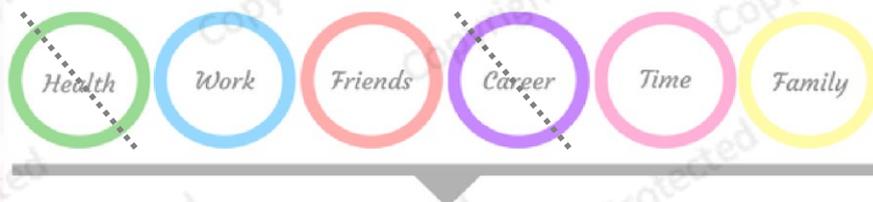
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A CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF LOSS

We spend a good portion of our lives working diligently to acquire those things that make life rich and meaningful- a home, family, friends, career, material comforts, and security. What happens when we lose these things or persons which are so important to us?



Sadness and grief are natural reactions when changes occur in familiar habits due to the loss of anything important; whether it is divorce, loss of a job, immigration, failure, breakups, illness, financial ruin, or death. It is inevitable; you cannot live a life without experiencing loss in a thousand different ways.

Everyone in their lifetime must from time to time confront the loss of something or someone. If we include our “little griefs” along with our “larger griefs” we can say that grief is as natural to every person as breathing. We experience losses as a form of grief, and how you handle these “little griefs” will in some measure tell you how you will probably handle “larger griefs” when they come your way.



Think about the problem of divorce, it creates grief in the hearts of those who have lost someone who was once dear to them. It is almost like a living death, to see the one whom you continue to love turning their back on you. Another form of grief may be retirement, not all people look forward to retirement age, they hope that their employers will make an exception in their case. Many of these people leave their jobs with a heavy heart having lost all reasons to live.

Then there is the person who has worked diligently to gain advancement in their job, who has worked overtime and weekends to demonstrate their ability to fill a particular position but is not chosen when the opportunity arises. Loss of control or the right to freedom have also been common losses experienced recently by many in different ways. Any of these things (and many more) sets in motion the cycle of grief.



Grief is a natural part of the human experience. We face minor grief almost daily in many situations. Through centuries, people who have been able to face grief have said that grief can be counted among the great deepening experiences of life.

The **ten stages of healthy grief** are understood to be a normal process, which most people must go through as they face up to their losses. Most humans must travel this path to get back to the mainstream of life. Remember, that every person does not necessarily go through all these stages, nor does a person necessarily go through them in this order. It is impossible to differentiate clearly between each of these stages, for a person never moves neatly from one stage to the other.

1

WE ARE IN A STATE OF SHOCK

Shock is a temporary escape from reality. As long it is temporary, it is good, but if a person should prefer to remain in this dream world rather than face the reality of loss, it would be unhealthy. Sometimes we just do not want to believe what has happened and so unconsciously we set obstacles in the way, making complete acceptance a very slow process.

2.

WE EXPRESS EMOTION

The emotional release comes at about the time it begins to dawn upon us how dreadful this loss is. Sometimes, without warning there wells up within us an uncontrollable urge to express our grief. We need to allow ourselves to express the emotion we feel. We must not and we need not apologize for emotion, to bottle it up unnecessarily is to do harm ourselves. Emotion is essential to humankind, and to try to repress it is to make you less than human.

3.

**WE FEEL
DEPRESSED AND
LONELY**

It is true, no two people face the same kind of loss in the same way. But the awful experience of being utterly depressed and isolated is a universal phenomenon. When we find ourselves in the depths of despair, we should remind ourselves that this is to be expected following a significant loss and that such depression is normal and part of healthy grief. Dark days do not last forever.

4

**WE MAY EXPERIENCE
PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS
OF DISTRESS**

It has been found that many patients in hospitals present with physical illness because of some unresolved grief. They have not worked through the central problems related to loss. There appears to be a strong relationship between illness and how a person handles great loss.

5.

**WE MAY BECOME
PANICKY**

When a person begins worrying about losing something they often panic. They become paralyzed by fear, it is often the fear of the unknown or fear of something they do not understand that throws them into this panic. The inability to concentrate in times of grief is natural. When something important to us is taken from us we cannot be expected to do anything but be constantly drawn to the lost object and suffer daily as we struggle with the gradually dawning realization that it is lost forever.

6.

**WE FEEL A SENSE OF
GUILT ABOUT THE
LOSS**

Normal guilt is the guilt we feel when we have done something or neglected something we were supposed to do that caused the loss. Neurotic guilt is feeling guilt out of proportion to our real involvement in a particular problem. Unresolved guilt and misunderstood emotions can make us miserable for years, or it may come out in a variety of physical symptoms of distress.

7.

**WE ARE FILLED
WITH HOSTILITY
AND RESENTMENT**

Gradually we move out of depression, and in so doing we may be more able to express some of the strong feelings of hostility and resentment which we may not even have been aware of. When we have something precious taken away from us, we inevitably go through a stage when we are very critical of everyone, and everything related to loss. The human being is always looking for someone to blame. Resentment is not a healthy emotion if allowed to take over, it can be very harmful, yet it is a normal part of the grief process.

8.

**WE ARE UNABLE
TO RETURN TO
USUAL ACTIVITIES**

Trying to re-enter life again, for some unexplainable reason we are unable to return to our usual activities, something just holds us back. There are many reasons but among them is the fact that our way of life makes it difficult for us to grieve any loss in the presence of other people. We conduct a quiet conspiracy of silence against it, we try never to talk about grief and certainly never display it by any outward sign. We are forced to carry all the grief within ourselves as its business as usual again for everyone else.

9.

**GRADUALLY HOPE
COMES THROUGH**

Now and then we get a glimpse of hope in one experience or another. This cloud which had been so dark begins to break up, rays of light come through. We need warm affection and encouragement that helps make it easier for us to sense that our present attitude of shutting out all-new opportunities for meaningful living is unrealistic. We find that other experiences in life can be meaningful again.

10

**ADJUSTING TO
REALITY**

We finally readjust our lives to reality; we do not become our old selves again. When we go through any significant loss we come out as different people. Depending upon the way we respond to life's unpleasant surprises we either emerge stronger or become weaker. Eventually, people come to understand that everything has not been taken from them, and we begin to work toward acceptance.

Points for turning losses into gains

Identifying new ideas and affirming them regularly can give you the compass you need to land on your feet on solid ground.

- You do not always need to be strong for others, it may help others to see your pain.
- Do not bury your feelings in anger, work, food, or alcohol.
- Be with the sadness when it comes, accept it, but don't invite it.
- Use emotional moments to communicate unspoken words to your loved ones or affirm beliefs that heal. This may intensify feelings and help release them.
- Stay with the pain of the negative memory but purposely follow it with a good one
- Find a support group or person with whom you can share feelings.
- Do not force yourself to feel pain. It is ok to enjoy life after loss.

