

GRIEF AND LOSS --- STEPS IN RECOVERY

Transitions, losses and the resulting grief are a normal and frequent part of life. A transition can be defined as anything that temporarily or permanently disrupts your normal routine and creates change in your life. It can be either positive or negative, something you have worked to achieve or something over which you have no control.

A transition may be anything, from the achievement of a long-term goal such as graduation or marriage, to the loss of a special person or place in your life. An important aspect of this process involves letting go and grieving for what was, and acknowledging the loss of your dream. There are several steps to the grief process, and many ways to deal with it. Several are listed below:

1) RECOGNIZE ALL OF THE LOSSES

Even in the obvious loss situation a person loses more than just one thing. When there is a death of a loved one, an individual not only loses the presence of the deceased, but also the future they were planning, the security of having that person there, the everyday interaction, and the dream of "happily ever after".

In the not-so-obvious- loss situation many things can also be lost. For example, the selling of the family car can spur feelings of grief. In this situation you are not only losing a known quantity, but are also letting go of something that has been an integral part of your family. This vehicle probably played a part in many memories, both positive and negative, that form the history of your family. It provided transportation when you brought your first child home from the hospital, when you got your puppy, that wonderful trip the coast, etc. No matter how small, it has become part of who you are, and it's loss will make some kind of impact.

2) BE WITH THE FEELINGS

It's OK to feel anger, frustration, guilt, anxiety, pain, depression and anything else that may come up. IT IS NORMAL, and is a sign that you are able to respond to life's experiences. Although shock/denial is part of the process, try not to deny or cover over your feelings for a long period of time --- this hinders the healing process. Be with the feelings, whatever it is, so the growth process can begin.

3) THE SUPPORT OF OTHERS

Since loss is part of living, everyone experiences it at some time. The task is to help yourself make the journey from immediate loss to eventual gain as rapidly, smoothly, and comfortable as possible. This is done by finding whatever support you need and being willing to talk about what has changed and your feelings about it. If you are helping someone who is grieving, you can be supportive by listening, and not being afraid to mention their loss for fear of reminding them about it. You can rest assured that it is probably very much in their mind, and they will welcome the opportunity to verbalize their thoughts. It is not necessary, or even desirable, to offer solutions or platitudes. Simply "being there" and accepting the feelings give the needed support. If you are grieving, find someone, or a support group, who can provide this vital role for

you.

4) LOSING IS NOT FAILING

Regardless of the loss, the self-esteem suffers a jolt. The person's thoughts are filled with guilt, worry, feeling of inadequacy, anger and self-deprecation. These thoughts are all symptoms of the grief process. Some people tend to punish themselves with "if only" statements (if only I had/hadn't done this or that this thing wouldn't have happened and I wouldn't have to deal with it or be in this emotional state now).

5) THE END

Yes, there is an end to each loss situation. If it is a major transition or huge loss, the person may never forget. However, they will eventually come to a place of acceptance and be able to get on with their life. If it is a smaller loss, the entire process may take a very short time. Each person will do it in his/her own time and own way. It's important to remember there is no right way to grieve. Whatever the feelings are, and however long it takes, is right for that person. Just remember time does heal and there will be an end to the suffering.

6) IT TAKES TIME

Even though we know intellectually that there will be an end to the intense feelings, the individual and people around him/her may get so tired of the pain, anxiety, inconsistencies and mental confusion that they try to rush the process. HEALING TAKES TIME! It's important to allow each person his/her own time.

7) THE ROLLER COASTER EFFECT

The process of moving through the stages of loss is not a smooth one. It is like riding a roller coaster --- up and down, fast and slow, around and around. The individual and the people around the individual need to know there will be inconsistencies in the emotions and behavior. The person often has no control over whatever s/he is feeling at any time. These changes take place in a matter of minutes, hours or days. Just know that the grieving person will eventually get off the roller coaster and return to a smoother, straighter, calmer ride.

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