

# COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

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Grief is the normal and natural response to loss, and it can be experienced at any time during our lives.

Loss can include such things as the death of a loved one, the ending of a relationship, or an unexpected change in lifestyle. While some people may recover quickly after a loss, others may experience a longer road to recovery.

Following are some steps that may help your wellbeing after experiencing a loss.

## **Acknowledge your loss**

Some people downplay their loss, and therefore do not acknowledge or even deny their grief.

However, it is important to accept that you have experienced a loss, and give yourself permission to have a reaction to this.

## **Understand the stages you may experience**

When we experience a loss, we may go through the following stages. Often this isn't as simple as starting at 'shock and denial' and ending up experiencing a 'return to meaningful life'. People can go through stages quickly, slowly, go back and forth between stages, skip stages, or experience them in a completely different order. So be gentle on yourself during these processes – it could take months, or years. We all experience grief and loss differently.

**Shock/Denial** – this can include avoiding the reality of the loss, confusion over what happened or what this means, fear for the future, numbness to experiences, and/or blame of self or others for the loss

**Anger** – this is a very natural reaction to loss, you may feel frustrated, anxious, irritable, embarrassed, or even shameful

**Depression** – you may feel flat, detached from others, overwhelmed, have a lack of energy, or feel helpless

**Dialogue/Bargaining** – you may want to reach out to others you trust to tell your story to, and you may desire to find meaning for what has happened

**Acceptance** – this often involves exploring options, and developing a new plan

**Return to Meaningful Life** – at this stage you feel empowered, your self-esteem may be greater, you have a sense of security, and a new meaning in your life

## **Understand how the loss may affect you**

Some people have strong thoughts, feelings or physical reactions after a loss.

*Feelings* can include sadness, anger, anxiety, disbelief, panic, relief or even numbness. Your feelings may be steady and consistent, all over the place, completely overwhelming and consuming, or you may avoid them altogether.

*Thoughts* can also be affected during grief. You

may think you are going crazy, that you will never get over this, that it's unfair, or that you wished it happened to someone else. This is a natural expression of pain and sadness.

*Physically* you may feel exhausted, have general aches and pains, lose or gain weight, feel nauseous, or have difficulties sleeping.

However, know that it's okay (and normal) to experience these things in the *short term* after a traumatic experience.

## **Seek the support of others you trust**

Having support after a loss is vital. You may find you need to talk often about your loss, or that just having company is enough. Make sure you choose someone you trust.

## **Make meaning of the loss**

Finding meaning of the loss can lead to a renewed sense of purpose. After a loss people often reassess their goals, values, and relationships – which can positively influence how they live their life.

## **Look after yourself in the best way you can**

Loss can often throw everyday routines out. And while it may be difficult as you're feeling stressed and you've got so much else to deal with; eating a healthy diet, exercising and sleeping well, using relaxation strategies, and not overusing alcohol or drugs will also help in your wellbeing after loss.

## **Understand that it's okay to seek help**

For most people they will feel like their intense thoughts, feelings and physical reactions are getting better after a few weeks.

However, if you *continue to experience* distressing symptoms or feelings, you feel numb or empty, your relationships are becoming problematic, you have little support, or you are increasing your use of drugs or alcohol, seeking professional assistance could be useful.

## **How can a psychologist help?**

Psychologists use a range of effective techniques and therapies to assist people in resolving any distressing symptoms they may have. Speak with your G.P., or call us at Awaken Psychology, if you think you could benefit from seeing a psychologist.

tips for  
recovery  
after loss