

GRIEF AND LOSS

Grief is often misunderstood by people who have never faced the loss of someone they are close too. Grieving is a health and natural process. IT IS NOT A SIGN OF WEAKNESS. Grieving usually follows a pattern that proceeds through a series of stages. Loss may be from death, divorce, job loss or even moving away from friends and family. Not all people experience grief in the same ways, however, most will experience and re-experience the process several times. The intensity of the grief differs with individual and is often more pronounced the closer you are to the situation.

It is important to understand that we have no control over grieving. You will grieve, however, if you manage yourself in a way that supports experiencing the pain and processing through the process the pain will over time greatly diminish. Those that refuse to acknowledge and deal with their painful feelings become "stuck" and often are never able to cope effectively with life.

Grief work is work. It takes courage to grieve . . . to tell someone with tears in your eyes, that you had three children and only two are still living; or that you were once happily married, but now you live alone; or Mother's Day or Father's Day has lost its meaning because you parent died.

People may feel uncomfortable as they observe your pain . . . so it takes courage not to run from your pain just to make others feel "okay." Finding others who do understand the pain of grief is important at this time. Although they are not always followed in order - the following are general stages that one goes through when grieving:

Denial

A period of numbness and shock usually follows a major loss or death. This stage allows a person time to absorb what has happened and begin to slowly adjust to the reality. Some people demonstrate denial by minimizing or diluting their feelings or the extent of the impact of the loss.

Anger and Guilt

As shock wears off, grief gives rise to a variety of feelings, including anger. You may feel angry with the person you lost for disappointing you or leaving you, angry with a company for laying you off, or even with God for letting a bad thing happen. You may feel unreasonably responsible for your loss or feel guilty about what you imagine you could have done to prevent it. You may even

feel guilty about some of your other feelings.

Sadness and Despair

Losses can bring varying degrees of sadness, loneliness and yearning. Your feelings may be so overwhelming that you try to avoid them. But tears, sadness, thinking about your loss, or other expressions of grief are not "breaking down," they are essential for healing. Reaching out to others is a key way to lessen loneliness and overcome depression.

Acceptance and Hope

Gradually accepting your loss and adjusting to the changes it brings can give you hope for the future. These changes take time, and may be painful, but they're also a chance for personal growth. During the most painful moments, it's hard to believe that your life will be better. But you will come out on the other side, perhaps stronger, perhaps wiser.

Aftermath

Just when you think you "should" be "over" your loss, reminders can plunge you into another wave of grief. Although this may continue for months or years, the waves usually become smaller, less frequent and easier to deal with over time.

Please reach out to your EAP, to a counselor, clergy, support groups and friends during this difficult period. You are loved and cared about. Allow others to assist you through this difficult time.