

How do you deal with loss?

Handout for Students

A loved one or acquaintance passing away can be incredibly sad, shocking and impactful. The impact is different and also manifest in different ways for different people. While there is obviously no "one-size-fits-all" approach, there is some general advice we would like to give you.

If you are not sure if what you are feeling is "normal" or are looking for someone to talk to, contact your academic advisor or the student psychologist. [Link](#)

WHAT IS MOURNING?

Grief is the process you go through in the face of loss. We usually refer to this when it concerns a death, but the same phases can also occur to a greater or lesser extent in the event of a relationship breakup or loss of a job, for example.

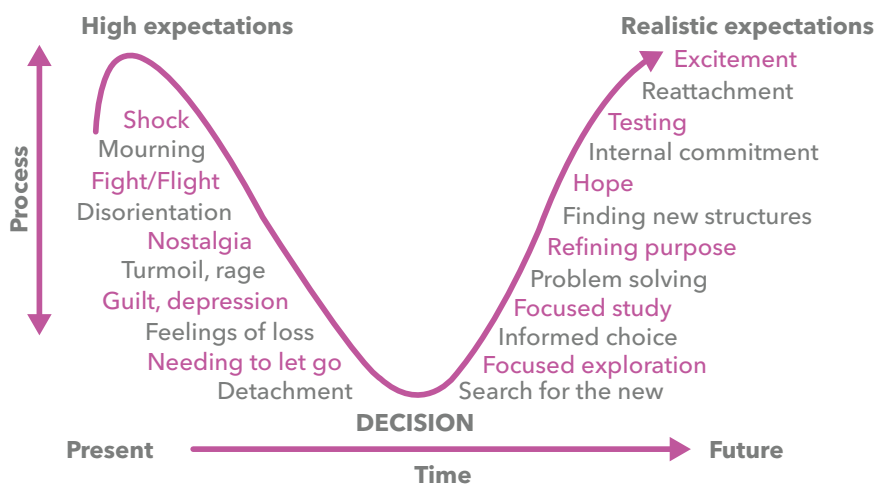
Roughly speaking, we distinguish five stages in grief:

1. Denial: this stage is characterized by shock and numbness.
2. Anger: in this phase we are angry and especially feel a lot of pain. From a lack of control over the situation, we may look for something or someone to blame.
3. Negotiation: this stage is somewhat like the denial stage and we look for ways in which we can still have hope.
4. Depression: in this phase we experience gloom and sadness. We experience a lack of life energy and often lack a sense of purpose.
5. Acceptance: we realize the reality of the situation and, little by little, find ways to pick up our lives again. This does not mean that we forget or no longer feel sadness, but rather that we no longer fight it.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross first described these five stages of grief. The duration of each of these phases varies and by now we also know from grief that not everyone goes through these phases in the same order. Also, we can go through the same phase multiple times or we can go through the whole process multiple times. Each phase takes time and we cannot speed up or force the steps.

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GRIEF TIPS

1. Find people you trust and with whom you experience support

In doing so, look to the people with whom you feel most comfortable. Maybe they are classmates, friends, or family members. For some people it is nice to talk to someone who knew the deceased, for others it is nicer to find someone more distant.

2. Listen to your needs

There are many ways to grieve, and the steps and order a person goes through them can vary. Some seek distraction, others go into "control mode," and others freeze. If you don't want to talk about it (yet), that doesn't mean you're not grieving. Sometimes you can't put it into words (right away). What you need can also vary from day to day. One day you may need distraction, the next you may need an arm around you. Try to indicate to those around you what you need from them so they don't have to fill this in for you.

3. Provide balance

Alternate talking, crying and being quiet. Find distractions from time to time as well, because otherwise everything can get too heavy. Getting away from the issue and doing some things from "normal life" is important too. So go do fun things when you feel like it; it's not crazy or weird. If you don't manage to find that balance or if you are unsure about how to handle this, talk to someone about it.

4. Be gentle with yourself

A sudden death often evokes intense feelings: from anger to guilt to fear. We sometimes tend to soothe feelings, but don't bottle them up and let them surface. Writing your feelings down - journaling - or sharing them with someone can also provide relief. And even if you didn't have a close relationship with the person who died, it's okay to be sad and to grieve. Grieving also takes time; you can't rush through it. Sometimes it seems like others (seemingly) pick up life quickly and you seem "stuck". Try not to pressure yourself to move on more quickly, as that will probably backfire.

HOW CAN I BE THERE FOR THE OTHER PERSON?

Check in regularly with your friends and fellow students. What has happened is intense and can have a great impact. For some this is very noticeable, for others it is not so visible from the outside. Checking in shows that you are available and ready to offer your support, and that you are okay with talking about it.

Ask what is needed, do not fill in or give unsolicited advice. Don't be put off by the fear of making the other person sad, because they usually are anyway. Moreover, don't be too afraid to "say the wrong thing". Often you don't have to say anything at all, nor does the other person expect you to have the magic words to make things better. Let them know that you care about them and are happy to be there for them when they need it. Being there for another person does not always mean the same thing as "talking about the issue". Going do something together or just put an arm around someone - that can also be enough.

READING TIPS

English

Title: It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand

Author: Megan Devine

About: Connecting with grief in a healthy way and how to move forward in your life

Title: Modern Loss: Candid Conversation About Grief. Beginners Welcome.

Authors: Rebecca Soffer and Gabrielle Birkner

About: Talking about loss and having a honest dialogue about grief

Dutch

Titel: Van Harte Gecondoleerd

Schrijver: Ameline An

Over: Omgaan met het verlies van ouders als jongvolwassene

Titel: Ik weet niet wat ik moet zeggen - Een hulpgids bij rouw

Schrijver: Mariska Overman & Rob Bruntink

Over: Praktische tips en handvatten in hoe iemand te steunen

Movies:

We don't "move on" from grief. We move forward with it | Nora McInerney [Link](#)

5 Things About Grief No One Really Tells You [Link](#)

