

COUNSELING CAPSULES

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Death: Understanding and Moving through Grief

The death of someone close to us is one of the most severe traumas we encounter and the sense of loss and grief that follows is a natural and important part of life. Grief is not a sign of weakness, but rather a healthy and fitting response - a tribute to one loved and lost to death. Running away from grief postpones sorrow. Clinging to grief prolongs pain. Neither leads to healing.

Common Reactions to Loss

No two people react exactly the same to a loss and there are significant cultural differences in how people grieve. For many, however, the most immediate response to the death of a loved one is shock, numbness, and a sense of disbelief.

- **Physical reactions** such as heart palpitations, tightness in the throat, shortness of breath, fatigue, nausea, headaches, chills, thirst, and muscle tremors are common.
- **Emotional reactions** may include a preoccupation with the image of the deceased, feelings of guilt, hostility, anxiety, fearfulness, apathy, self-doubt, denial, grief and emptiness. Loss of sexual drive, depressed mood, anger at the deceased for dying, and extreme sadness also may occur.
- **Physical symptoms** such as stomach upset, sleep and/or appetite disturbances, loss of energy, restlessness, pacing, and changes in activity level may occur.
- **Cognitive reactions** such as confusion, poor attention, memory problems, disbelief, poor concentration, hypervigilance and nightmares are common.

Factors That May Interfere With Resolving Your Grief

- Avoiding your emotions
- Over-activity to the point of exhaustion
- Using alcohol or other drugs to mask the grief
- Unrealistic promises made to the deceased
- Unresolved grief from a previous loss
- Judgmental relationships
- Acting resentful toward those who try to help

Factors That May Help You Resolve Your Grief

- Give yourself time alone to think about moving toward a new equilibrium - a transition from who you were before the loss to who you will be after the grieving process.
- Be as open as you can be in expressing your feelings: Cry if you need to and express any anger or sense of unfairness you feel.
- Play out in your mind the unfinished business in the relationship and try to come to a resolution. Say "good-bye."
- Tell someone you trust the story of your loss. Talking is the most healing medicine.
- Try to focus on what you were able to do for the deceased, instead of what you "should have done" or "could have done."

Seldom does a person go into one side of grief and come out the other side the same as before the loss. Think of going through your grief, rather than getting over the loss.

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HELP! WHERE CAN YOU FIND IT?

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