

Grief & Bereavement

Introduction by Kelly Scott

Only people who are capable of loving strongly can also suffer great sorrow, but this same necessity of loving serves to counteract their grief and heals them. - Tolstoy

So what is grief?

Grief is our EMOTIONAL response to loss - any type of loss not just the loss we experience when someone we love dies. We grieve when we lose something or someone significant to us. Some say that it is nature's way of healing a broken heart as it is a natural and necessary process which later enables us to re-invest ourselves in life after the loss has occurred.

The most important thing to remember when it comes to grief is that it is NORMAL. It has no time limit. No one can tell you 'how long it will take' and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Everyone is unique and our reaction to a loss will depend on many factors including our own individual feelings and relationships. We may experience similar feelings to others, but each person's grief is their own.

Grief Reactions

Grief encompasses so many different feelings, physical reactions, behaviours and cognitions which are all normal reactions when we have experienced a significant loss. These may include:

Anger, Guilt, Sadness, anxiety, loneliness, relief, yearning, numbness Lack of energy, tightness in the chest, breathlessness, weariness, headaches Disbelief, confusion, sleeplessness, crying, social withdrawal, absent mindedness, dreams & nightmares and many, many more.

Why is grieving necessary?

Grief is an important part of our life cycle. From birth to death we experience many significant losses in our lives . A toddler may cry and show distress when they lose a favourite comforter or dummy. A child may experience grief reactions when his/her best friend moves away. A teenager may demonstrate all of the above behaviours when their relationship with a boy/girlfriend ends. A parent may feel anger, sadness, anxiety and loneliness when their child finally moves out of home (the empty nest syndrome).

Keep in mind that often when a death occurs, other losses we may have experienced in the past surface, as it is a time when society gives you 'permission' to grieve. There are rituals in society like the funeral service to which allow a time of grieving not available to us after we experience other significant losses. Grieving is necessary for healing the wounds of separation. It helps through the tremendous changes that a death/loss brings. A bereaved person who has not 'successfully' grieved is more prone to both physical and psychological illness.

In order for us to 'go on' with life we need to work through our grief. Some describe going through grief in stages like denial, anger, bargaining (the 'if only's'), depression and finally acceptance but for most of us it's a little bit of everything, ups and downs, sometimes degrees of each in the same day. You may feel in shock, denying that your loss is real and in the next minute feel overwhelming sadness of what you have lost. You may just be starting to go out again socially and starting to feel 'on top of things' when a special occasion like a birthday or anniversary brings all those initial feelings rushing back again like it was yesterday.

Grieving is a long term process and many professionals including J. William Worden have written about *working through grief* as opposed to passing through stages like you have no control over them. Worden established his Four Tasks of Mourning which include:

* *Accepting the reality of the loss* by working through the denial and searching phase. The funeral itself helps us to accept that the loss has occurred. We are confronted by the reality at the viewing or service.

* *Working through the pain* of grief by not avoiding painful thoughts/experiences and being able to talk about your loss and express your feelings and thoughts.

* *Adjusting to Environment in which the deceased is missing* which is all about realising the roles of the deceased in your life and adjusting to new roles.

* His fourth task is to *emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life*. This does not mean forgetting about the person and their relationship to you, but rather finding a place for them while still leaving room for others in you life and being able to form new relationships. When you understand that this is all part of your grief you can begin to realise that it does take time.

Needs of the bereaved.

Give people who are grieving ‘Permission to Grieve’ by letting them share their feelings whatever they may be. Allow them to cry if they want to. Don’t offer the bereaved platitudes such as “Chin up, think of the kids” or “Be strong” or “It was meant to be” or worst of all “I know how you feel”. This does not give them permission to grieve, it only tells them to hold their feelings in but it also says to the bereaved that you really don’t know what to say to make them feel better.

* Be an attentive listener. People who are grieving often need someone to just listen more than anything else. Analysing their experiences / actions / thoughts and words or offering advice on what they should and shouldn’t do can interrupt their grief process and make them less likely to open up again. This is not the time to give your opinion or version of your story. This is the time to put aside your own story and keep the focus on them.

* Anticipate difficult times and offer support especially for occasions like anniversaries birthdays, holidays

* Be patient. People who are grieving will often go over the same particular story again and again as they are trying to accept the reality of the loss. This is an important time to be an attentive listener.

* Let them know that what they are going through is normal. Everyone reacts differently and what helps one person may not work for another. .

* They may need permission to take a break too. You can’t grieve all the time.

* People who are grieving need time. They need time not only to adjust to their loss but adjust to the change in their lives that loss brings with it.

* We find a place for what we lose. Although we know that after such a loss the acute stage of mourning will subside, we also know that we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a

substitute. No matter what fills the gap- even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else. (E.L. Freud, 1961, p.386)

(In J. William Wordens book Page 19)

T.J. Scott & Son understand the significance of the bereavement process. Please contact the Scott family for more information on the large number of brochures and books available. Below is a list of other resources that are available:

Grief & Bereavement Contact Directory

Crisis Line	(24 hours a day)		93290300
Life Line	(24 hours a day)		131114
Grief Line	(12pm-12am)		95967799
Kids Help Line	(24 hours a day)		1800 551800
Colleen Beattie	(local grief counselor)	54227143 (wk)	54241495 (hm)

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES & SUPPORT SERVICES

Cobaw Community Health Service, Kyneton	54223011
- Family Counselling	54211666
Macedon Ranges Health Service, Gisborne	54283000

Government groups

Centrelink	132300
Department of Veterans Affairs	1800113304

SUPPORT GROUPS/ NETWORKS

Bonnie Babes - Counsel families after the loss of a baby. 95634004 - P.O.Box 2220, Rowville, 3178	98000322
SANDS	98990218
The Compassionate Friends	1800641091
Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute - Bereavement Support Group	96561031
Solace Association of Victoria	93841722
State Coroners Office - Grief Counselling & Support Services	9684444
Centre for Grief Education Bereavement Counselling Service	98220433
National Association for Loss & Grief Victoria	93313555
Grief & Bereavement Website:	www.grief.org.au