GRIEF

What is grief?
We all face numerous losses throughout our lives. The term “Grief” is used to describe reactions and feelings that a person might have to any kind of significant loss. Grieving is a necessary psychological process we experience as the result of a loss. It helps the person to come to terms with the loss. The most intense grief experience usually comes from the death of a loved one. We can also grieve over major life changes. Grief often follows:
(a) loss of a pet
(b) parental separation
(c) separation from family or friends, moving away from home or loss of homeland
(d) separation or breakup of an intimate relationship
(e) loss of a job
(f) leaving school or university
(g) diagnosis of a serious illness or a loved one’s serious illness
(h) loss of ability to function on a daily basis through an illness or disability
(i) loss of a pregnancy

Characteristics of grief
There is not a typical response to loss. No two people will ever grieve the same way, with the same intensity, or for the same duration. Grieving is a personal and unique process. How you grieve depends on many factors, including: (a) the nature of the loss, (b) previous losses, (c) the depth, length and/or quality of relationship with the person lost, (d) cultural and religious background, (e) individual coping style, (f) physical health, (g) individual support systems and resources. Questions often arise as to how long grief lasts. There is no timetable for the grieving process. Some grievers overcome grief much more quickly than others. Even though each person’s grief is different, there are some commonalities in response to loss.

Common grief reactions
Grief may cause a multitude of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms. These symptoms might include:
- increased alcohol consumption & use of drugs or tranquilizers which are not prescribed by a psychiatrist
- constant denial of the loss and distressful feelings associated with the loss, keeping busy to avoid the emotional distress of the loss
- constant avoidance of people and things related to the topics that are reminders of the loss experienced
- increased physical complaints and health concerns
- emotional roller coasters for more than two months
- constant neglection of self care and/or basic responsibilities (i.e. class absenteeism)
- self‐injurious thoughts and behaviors
- intense, pervasive sense of guilt
- withdrawal from life for one year or more

Coping with grief and loss
Be patient with the process while caring for yourself. You need to allow yourself time to grieve when the loss is the death of someone close to you. Within the first few weeks to months after a death, you may find yourself riding on a roller coaster of shifting emotions. There might be a lot of up and down moments. You may have a couple of good days and then a bad one. Sometimes after a period of feeling better, you find yourself in the same place you were when you were sad. Anxiety, anger, guilt, despair. You may even feel lost. You may experience declines in your academic and social performance. This is the nature of grief—one moment you are up, and the next moment you are down. It’s all part of the process. Memory loss is important to take care of yourself—eat well, relax and exercise. Grief is exhausting; you may feel physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. Therefore, it is important that you do not take on too much responsibility in the process of grieving.

Get support. It can be good to seek the company of someone who is a good listener—someone who appears to be open to simply listen to you rather than telling you what you should do to cope with the loss you have experienced. People around you sometimes may be unable to make out what you need and may not know what to say or do when they are with you. For this reason, it is important that you figure out what is right for you and let them know what your needs are to get the relevant form of support.

Don’t make any major decisions. Grief, which is a multifaceted, emotional process, can cloud your thoughts and emotions. You may have the tendency to make good long-term decisions because you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings. Make sure, restfully, you are not making momentous decisions that will affect the rest of your life.

Avoid drinking alcohol or using other drugs. Alcohol and non-prescription drugs will only mask the pain, slow your recovery, and could lead to new problems. Consult a psychiatrist at first if you think you need medical help.

Give yourself a break from grief. We all have some ways to relieve stress such as listening to the music, taking time with friends, or engaging in physical activity. Try keeping yourself busy doing the things you have always enjoyed— even if they seem useless and not enjoyable at this time.

Allow yourself to share your feelings. It is important to be able to express grief. Speaking to someone who is close to you is one way that you are experiencing will help you to accept the loss and face the associated feelings. Spend time with friends and family members to share your grief. For people who experience difficulty in coping with their loss, counseling (provided by professionally trained people such as counselors, clinical psychologists or a psychiatrist) may be necessary.

References: Grief. The Unabridged Student Counseling Virtual Pamphlet Collection http://www.rochester.edu/ucc/help/virtualpamphlet/index.html

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