

What Complicates Grief?

- Circumstances of the death
- Other losses occurring at the time of the death - loss of finance etc
- Ambivalent relationship with the deceased
- When a body is missing
- Multiple losses
- Past complicated reactions to a death
- Personality of the griever
- Lack of support networks



The morning after John's death, I remember feeling absolutely enraged that the world had kept turning and the sun had come up as if nothing had happened.'

Lindsay Nicholson (2005)

Guidelines for Grievers

Recognise your loss

Be with the pain

Know you are not alone

Accept yourself

Eat well

Exercise

Don't compare yourself with others

Be with your friends

Postpone decisions

Writing helps

Take one day at a time

Don't make major decisions in the first year after the death

Seek professional help if necessary

Regional Suicide Resource Office
Front Block, St. Patrick's HoSpital
Johns Hill, Waterford.
Tel: 051 - 874013 Fax: 051 - 853037

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Understanding Grief

“Grief can make you feel crazy. Every emotion is let loose and comes flooding in, eroding any sense of balance. The normal routine of the most stable individual can be disrupted by bursting into tears or being totally distracted by the pain of loss. There is no shortcut to make the turmoil disappear.”

Perchy (1989)

Understanding Grief

The psychic pain experienced when one loses someone/something they love is called **grief**. This pain can be caused by many types of losses - marital breakdown, loss of health, unemployment, emigration, ageing and death. When a person is bereaved they lose the physical presence of the one who has died. They also lose their relationship with that person. This often leaves them asking the question "Who am I now without this person in my life?" We have not been taught what to expect when we are faced with grief. Often we need to be told that how we feel and behave at such a time is a normal part of the grieving process. Grief will affect us at different levels namely:

- Feelings
- Physical sensations
- Thoughts
- Behaviours
- Social difficulties
- Spiritual difficulties

If we engage with our grief we can grow to embrace it and learn to live fulfilling lives in the future. This can occur even when we struggle with traumatic deaths.



'We are all amateurs at grief; it comes to us all; we must all go through it'

Jerusha Mc Cormick (2006)

What can we expect?

Grieving does not occur in a neat pattern, it swings like a pendulum between loss and restoration. Grieving will take time. There is no right way to grieve as each person's grief is unique. There is no time frame in which we must grieve, - it takes a different pace for every individual. Grief does bring up strong emotions and can open the wounds of past losses.

It is important to take time out from our grief as we need our denial to help us through.

- Routine will help.
- We need to remember that while we often 'cope' well after a loved one dies, grieving does not just happen we need to actively engage with it.
- It takes courage to grieve.

Like any crisis in life, having a good support network of family, friends or work colleagues will help us through the grieving process.



'Grieving expressed openly and honestly, can be one of the most liberating experiences of life'

Jerusha Mc Cormick (2006)

What is the grieving process?

The grieving process involves moving beyond initial shock to realise that the loss has happened. The bereaved need to work through the pain of the loss and adjust to a world where their loved one is missing. This will allow them to accept the loss and learn to live again.

The initial reaction is one of shock which allows the bereaved to 'shut down' as they slowly realise what has happened. As the numbness lessens, the pain of the loss increases. It is quite normal to feel sad and anxious and to experience loneliness and a longing for the deceased. The sense of hurt felt at the unfairness of the loss can often be expressed in anger. This needs healthy expression or it can cause bitterness. It is not uncommon to carry regrets about things not said or done. Once the unbearable pain has subsided, the bereaved can begin to reminisce and re-experience past events with the deceased. They begin to reinvest in life, making small changes and doing new things never shared with the deceased. The past relationship is replaced with a 'memory relationship' of the deceased which they hold within them. The bereaved person begins to actively engage in life without the presence of the deceased.

Finally they are able to think and speak of the deceased person without pain. They may still feel sadness at the loss but the intense pain has subsided.