



## the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Grief and Loss**

**G**rief is a subjective, internal, and often painful response to loss which is experienced psychologically, socially, and physically. The Counseling For Loss & Life Changes reports that grief is experienced psychologically through your mental thoughts and feelings, socially through the interaction you have with those around you, and physically through the health of your body. While most of us associate grief with death, we can experience the feelings of grief for other losses, such as the loss of a job, the loss of a relationship, or the loss of a prized possession.

It is important to realize that no two people grieve alike, or for the same amount of time. The length of time a person usually spends grieving the loss of a loved one can be determined by a person's personality, coping behaviors, previous grief experiences, and past relationship with the loved one.

"For some people and some relationships, the grieving period may be a matter of few months. For others grief may be measured in years; perhaps one or two for certain kinds of deaths, or even three to five years for more serious or unexpected or traumatic deaths," says James E. Miller, author of *Resources for Those Who Are Grieving*.

Grieving is usually characterized by internal symptoms, such as sadness, anxiety, guilt, exhaustion, helplessness, and loneliness. The physical symptoms that are known to plague a person throughout the grieving process are constant aches and pains, nausea, trembling, dizziness, and tightness in the throat and chest areas.

### **Signs & Symptoms**

- Shock
- Heart Palpitations
- Disbelief or Denial
- Restlessness
- Light headedness or dizziness
- Headaches
- Absentmindedness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Dreams and Visions
- Guilt and anger
- Inappropriate Eating
- Social Withdrawal
- Tightness in the throat and chest areas
- Assuming Mannerisms or Traits of the Loved One
- Empty Feeling in the Stomach
- Hearing a Loved Ones Presence (Footsteps or Voice)

The Death&Dying.com website offers the following descriptions of the feelings and behaviors that may be experienced during the four stages of the grieving process:

- 1. Shock and Numbness:** crying, searching, sighing, physical symptoms, loss of appetite, sleep disturbances, muscle weakness, limited concentration, inability to make decisions, outbursts of emotion, and impeded functioning.
- 2. Searching and Yearning:** restlessness, impatience, poor memory and lack of concentration, social isolation, crying, anger, loss of energy, testing what is real.
- 3. Disorientation:** low compliance with orders of physician, resistance to reaching out or sharing with others, urge to try to live if nothing has happened, restlessness, irritability.
- 4. Reorganization:** renewed energy, stable sleeping and eating habits, relief from physical symptoms, better judgement making, increased interest in goals for the future.



# How Can a Counselor Help a Grieving Person?

While it helps to have a strong support system, a person who is overwhelmed with grief should consider contacting a mental health professional. A professional counselor can help a person better understand what they are feeling and offer support that family and friends are unable to provide. "Not everyone will need the expertise of a professional counselor to recover from grief. But if the circumstances of the loss seem to be more than you can handle, or if you are not sure whether what you are experiencing is "normal," a trained counselor will be able to help you sort out these feelings," says licensed psychologist, Lynn Mary Karjala, Ph.D.

It is often a good idea to become involved in a support group. Grieving support groups allows people who have had similar experiences, share their feelings and ease their loneliness. Grieving support groups also allow a person to express their grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding.



## Tips on Dealing with Grief

THE AMITABHA HOSPICE SERVICE OFFERS THE FOLLOWING TIPS ON SELF-CARE FOR THE BEREAVED CAREGIVER, NEXT OF KIN, OR CLOSE FRIEND:

- Accept the help of a good friend, talk with them, and share your burden. It does lighten the load.
- Go ahead and have a "good cry" - it helps both physiologically and psychologically.
- Be kind to yourself and have compassion for yourself - what is done is done. Accept your and others' limitations of the past and the present. Replaying old hurtful scenes will not improve them, but every time you judge yourself or others it can take on your current temperament and view. It is only your view, painted as you see it - others will see it differently - make room for another way of seeing the past.
- Let go of wishing you could change the past and accept what can't be changed. The present is the only time you have - the future is created by present moments.
- Practice rejoicing in the good memories, enjoy the memories of mutual kindness and laughter and dedicate all these to the future success and happiness of the dead and those left behind.
- Focus on the positive, start with what is near: a sunset, a summer breeze, a hot shower, a fresh flower, take a deep breath and let the beauty and enjoyment fill your being, giving you strength, comfort and healing.

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

**Web Site** [www.portagepath.org](http://www.portagepath.org)

**Appointments** 330-253-3100  
800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

**Support Hotline** 330-434-9144  
888-434-8878



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