Journey Through Grief and Loss

Women’s Stress Disorders Treatment Program
William S. Middleton VA Hospital
2500 Overlook Terrace
Madison, WI 53705
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Grief is a tidal wave that overtakes you, smashes down upon you with unimaginable force, sweeps you up into its darkness, where you tumble and crash against unidentifiable surfaces, only to be thrown out on an unknown beach, bruised, reshaped.

Ericsson, 1993
Certainly, loss of a loved one is a primary cause of grief and loss reactions.

- Loss of a spouse through death or divorce
- Loss of a parent or child through death or divorce
- Loss of a family member or friend
- Miscarriage
- Loss of a beloved pet
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Understanding grief and loss:

There are many other situations that are, not as often, recognized as grief or loss but can still be quite painful:

- Loss of functioning through disability
- Loss of sense of identity
- Loss of sense of security
- Loss of childhood through abuse or neglect
- Loss of a job or financial stability
- Loss of health
When you experience a loss keep in mind the following points:

- Give yourself sufficient time to grieve. You may not feel up to your normal activities for a time. Mourning a loss in your life can sap you of your energy and joy. Allowing yourself to slow down a bit will help you recover in the long run.

- Grief does not follow any time schedule. Some people may begin to feel better sooner than others. Allow yourself time to grieve for as long as you need it.
When you experience a loss keep in mind the following points:

◆ Grief is a normal reaction to a loss.

◆ Many people who have studied grief reactions believe that there are many stages you go through when grieving: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These stages may come in different orders and be re-experienced over and over again in varying intensities. (Elizabeth Kubler Ross, On Death and Dying.

No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear.

C.S. Lewis
When you experience a loss keep in mind the following points:

- Grief may make you feel physically ill.

- Physical sensations may include the following:
  - Hollowness in your stomach
  - Tightness in your chest
  - Oversensitive to noise
  - A sense of “depersonalization” where nothing seems real
  - Breathlessness or short of breath
  - Weakness in your muscles
  - Dry mouth
  - Lack of energy
  - Tightness in your throat

Worden, J. W.
When you experience a loss keep in mind the following points:

You may feel overwhelmed with any, or all, of the following:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt and self-reproach
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Fatigue
- Helplessness
- Shock
- Yearning
- Relief
- Numbing
- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Preoccupation

Worden, J.W.
When you experience a loss keep in mind the following points:

You may have problems with any, or all of the behaviors listed below for a while:

- Sleep disturbance/dreams
- Appetite change
- Absent mindedness
- Social withdrawal
- Crying
- Sighing
- Restless over activity
- Avoid reminders of the loss

*Worden, J.W.*
Suggestions for Coping with Grief and Loss:

Be kind to yourself...

Allow yourself enough time and space to adequately recover. Our society is too fast paced and sometimes expects people to recover too quickly. This means honoring the fact that you are grieving and not feeling up to par. You may need more rest, more time spent with friends and family, and fewer demands. If possible, try to structure things at a slower pace for yourself.

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Suggestions for Coping with Grief and Loss:

Be kind to yourself...

Give yourself permission to grieve. This may mean giving yourself some time alone to cry, or time to remember happier times. Sometimes surrounding yourself with pictures will be comforting and helpful, other times, you may want to avoid looking at them. Do what feels right to you.
Suggestions for Coping with Grief and Loss:

Be kind to yourself...

Accept help from others when it is offered. This is difficult if you are more used to giving help than getting it. You will likely find a way to give back to others for acts of kindness you graciously accept now.
Suggestions for Coping with Grief and Loss:

- Join a support group in your area. Most hospitals or Hospices in your area have some kind of group that might be helpful.
- Make a list of people you can call when you feel overwhelmed with grief. Accept their help and support.
Suggestions for Coping with Grief and Loss:

◆ Anniversaries, birthdays, holidays and other special events may cause you to feel your grief more intensely. Anticipate that this may be a more difficult time and plan for it.

◆ You may find it helpful to plan to do things differently in honoring your loss. For example, you may decide to plant a tree every year for a lost loved one’s birthday.
Suggestions for Coping with Grief and Loss:

◆ You may want to plan a special remembrance for holidays like lighting a candle and talking about the good times enjoyed with your loved one.

◆ For the first of any anniversary or holiday you may feel better if your plans change from your normal routine all together. For example, visit someone else. Do what feels right to you.
Sometimes the feelings you have about the loss may even be conflicting which will cause you to feel confused. There may be times that you feel glad or relieved about the loss but at the same time very upset.

It may be helpful to talk to a counselor or therapist for a time to help sort out these feelings.
Suggestions for Coping with Grief and Loss:

◆ For some people, grief seems endless. You endure one trauma or tragedy after another. You may feel you never had time to recover from one loss before the next one occurred.

◆ If this is the case you may be suffering from “complicated grief” which never seems to get better.

◆ It is difficult to deal with this without the help of a professional. Ask your doctor for a referral to a therapist.
Grief never, entirely, goes away but you can learn to live with it.

“Sadness flies on the wings of the morning and out of the heart of darkness comes the light”

- Jean Giraudoux

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