

## Grieving a Loss    Myths People Say and Believe About Grieving

**Definition of Grief:** The conflicting feeling caused by a change or an end in a familiar pattern of behavior.

\*Grief can be for any type of loss: Death of a person, divorce, moving, death of a pet, injury, loss of a job, loss of trust, loss of safety.

\*Other behaviors can emerge when not confronting feelings: depression, eating disorders, hidden anger, etc..

**1. "Don't feel bad."**                      The degree to which a person is impacted by loss is unique to that individual.

\*Example: A person's mother just died in a car accident.

**\*When people try to minimize the pain- it prevents that person from coping- it gives the message**

Common responses: "Don't feel bad- she lived a long life."

**that their feelings aren't important.**

**2. Replace the loss.**

\*Example: A person's pet dies.                      Common response: "Don't feel bad- we can get another one."

\*Example: A breakup with a girlfriend or boyfriend.                      Common response: "Don't feel bad- there are plenty of fish in the sea."

\*The above responses dismiss the importance of the relationship.                      \*People need also to realize that all relationships are unique.

\*People need to feel bad when their feelings are hurt. Other people shouldn't try to fix the hurt immediately with a replacement. Time should be given to cope with the emotions in a healthful way.

**3. Grieve Alone**

\*Example: A child is emotionally upset and begins to cry- a parent then responds as such:

"If you're going to cry- cry in your room."

\*This response teaches the child not to express sadness in front of others.

\*Children and adults should be able to discuss their feelings and why they may be sad and then how to cope with them in a healthful way.

\*The expression of emotions in a healthful way frees up energy to deal with life.

**4. Be Strong**

Example: A young boy's father has recently died.

Common response: "You need to be strong for your family. You are the man of the house now."

\*This response teaches the child not to show emotion because it is a sign of weakness. It also teaches the child that childhood is not allowed (another loss), and he will have to be an adult.

\*Being honest during a time of grief does show strength.

**5. Time Heals All Wounds**

\*Many people believe that with time the pain of the loss will diminish and eventually go away.

\*This belief is unrealistic because "time" by itself doesn't heal but the actions a person takes within an amount of time specific to that person.

\*Another misconception is that a person will "get over it" with time. When people say this it carries the message that by "getting over it" will mean a person will forget about their loss.

In the situation of a death of a loved one, a person may always have memories of that person and will usually be sad to some degree for the loss of that person.

Stages of Grief

1. Denial and Disbelief

It is a defense mechanism that buffers the immediate shock.

We block out the words and hide from the facts. This is a temporary response that carries us through the first wave of pain.

2. Anger

We are not ready. The intense emotion is deflected from our vulnerable core, redirected and expressed instead as anger.

3. Bargaining

The normal reaction to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability is often a need to regain control

4. Depression

5. Acceptance                      This phase is marked by withdrawal and calm.

