

GRIEF AND LOSS:

**HOW TO UNDERSTAND THEM,
TRANSIT THEM AND HELP OTHER
PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS.**

SELF-HELP GUIDE



Do you know what a loss implies?

Loss is a phenomenon that is reflected on a daily basis in our lives. For example, it is very common to manifest it in our talks. When we do it, we relate it to the absence of something that we no longer have, be it a friend, a family member, an object, the experience of failure, the loss of some capacity, ruin, separations, moving house and, above all, everything, the death of loved ones. This means that we can give different meanings to loss based on our personal point of view or on some socially accepted criteria. The truth is that, throughout our lives, we experience loss in different ways, and each one bears its own pain and affects us in a particular way.



How to understand our response to a loss?

Most of the information about it has been determined through numerous investigations. For example, one of the most painful losses refers to the death of a loved one, and this guide will basically be based on this. In these cases, those who go through this strong experience usually have certain similar feelings, reactions, and healing processes, although it also depends on each individual and the way in which they face adversity, or the quality of the bond maintained with the deceased person.

For this reason, perhaps if we refer to "stages of grief", we would be making an error, since it could be understood that we all go through this process in the same way when in reality it is not, despite the fact that there are stages through which we commonly go through this process. usually go through.

Generally, there are several phases through which mourning occurs when the unexpected death of a family member occurs due to dissimilar causes, whether due to a heart attack, an accident, etc. Even in cases like these, those affected have patterns in common. However, its duration or intensity could vary or have some difference.

Phase 1. Denial

Mainly when death surprises, a process of "intense mourning" ensues, during which it is very difficult to accept. During the first period of loss, on a physical level, one usually feels shocked, dazed, confused. Many may experience panic, hear voices, see things, all of which further complicates the possibility of becoming aware of assuming reality and the perceived pain.

When hearing the news about a death that is unexpected or that seems unbelievable, we usually react with expressions such as "it can't be true", "this is not true", "there must be some mistake", "I recently spoke with him (or her)", etc. On the other hand, if death occurs in accidental circumstances, such as a plane crash, people cling to the hope that their loved one was able to survive, until the harsh reality has to be accepted. Even when death has already been acknowledged, there are people who continue to behave as if the loved one were still alive, revealing that they have sometimes thought they saw his face in crowds. These are reactions considered within the normal framework, which expose the conflicts experienced in the assimilation of the news of a traumatic death.

At the behavioral level, distraction, feelings of being disorganized or unable to perform routine daily tasks are perceived. For this reason, emotional support for the person is so important.

Phase 2. Anger and irritability

Frequently, when we come into contact with emotions for the first time after the denial phase, anger or irritability, helplessness or frustration usually appear. These feelings may also be directed against those who are believed to be responsible for that death, whether it be a driver of a vehicle, a doctor, or some other person, all of which may be evident to those who are part of our closest environment, who may suffer the misunderstanding, irritability, detachment, indisposition, or resentment towards them. Thus, the person who suffers is, in a certain way, trapped in this feeling of claiming another, not being able to effectively elaborate their mourning.



In this phase, questions can also arise such as: how am I going to live without him (or her)? but without the loved one.

Phase 3. Bargaining, Assimilation and Depression

As people experiencing loss become more aware of their loss, they often begin to have more realistic reactions on an emotional level. Sometimes it happens that, if our loved one suffered a lot before dying, sometimes a sense of relief emerges despite the pain, or sometimes guilt for having wanted his death, even unconsciously, in order to reduce his own pain and exhaustion and that of the loved one. Similarly, in this phase, attention is paid to daily activities, social distancing occurs, reflections, bad dreams, and symptoms of depression appear, crying, lack of concentration, loss of appetite, hopelessness, anxiety, the hallucinations.

Even so, the general stress caused by a loss can have a serious impact on our physical health, with nervousness, fatigue, digestive disorders, high susceptibility of the immune system to various diseases being common, which justifies the high mortality rate after the loss. However, over time we gradually adapt to the loss, no matter how much pain it causes us, ending up accepting it. This physiological stress is also overcome little by little once the absence of the deceased begins to be assimilated, finding ways to continue moving forward.

Phase 5. Acceptance



Finally, the feelings of anguish and pain experienced during the assimilation phase begin to pass into a kind of acceptance and resignation of the situation of loss. This does not mean that nostalgia and sadness cease to exist for a long time afterwards, but they do improve our level of functioning and concentration, gradually recovering emotional self-control, daily habits, appetite, food and rest.

The same happens with our energy, which we are recovering little by little, being able to also reconquer the social environment, readjusting objectives, etc.

BUT HOW CAN YOU ADAPT TO THIS KIND OF LOSS?

Here are some practical suggestions that can go a long way in adjusting to a loss. This does not mean that only these steps help effectively, but they are suggestions that you or anyone, in these circumstances, can apply.

Some suggestions can be implemented in practice when loss is anticipated. Others, on the other hand, can only be followed when adversity presents itself at the moment. In any case, we must remember that grief and the experience of a loss are very personal experiences, so there is no single way for affected people to recover or face them.

1. Take small losses seriously

This means that we could spend time worrying about noticing what we feel when a friend or relative leaves our side moving to another city or country, or the feeling that overwhelms us when we leave a house or our dog dies, etc. This leads us to pay attention to what it feels like and somehow adjust to more significant losses in our lives. Even the death of our little fish can be used as a simple "learning opportunity", educating our children about what death implies, preparing them for the losses they will suffer throughout their lives.

2. Acknowledge the reality of the loss and the importance of letting go

The first thing a person going through a grieving process should do is face the reality of the death of that other loved one and that they will not return.

Controlling tendencies play an important part in the healthy process of acknowledging a loss. Control will hinder our capacity to accept and let go by keeping us stagnant and fixated. Notice how much anger is really stemming from the fact that you had no control over the outcome. Notice your feelings of helplessness associated to the irrational idea that you could have done something "better" to prevent it and try to replace the idea with acceptance and compassion by understanding this was not really your choice. Practice doing this exercise with kindness every day, when the threatening thoughts appear.

3. Prepare to feel and be with ourselves

Losses often make it very difficult to focus on our lives given the pain, anguish, and despair that it feels, but it is very important that we can find moments of calm and silence to be alone and without distractions. A very positive practice can be to write our own reflections or experiences in periods of change, which can provide us with feelings of comfort and understanding about what happened. It is also important to notice how much of our pain could be potentially linked to our empty - inner spaces or individual needs. Notice in this case how sadness stems from a selfish place of “I miss...because I need...” that may be worth treating by empowering our self-esteem and self-values.

Allow yourself to grieve by fully experiencing feelings such as sadness, anger, shock, and loneliness. We should not judge ourselves for any perceived feelings, even if we think it is not appropriate to feel them. A grieving person must allow themselves to find ways to process and release intense emotions, even if this means screaming or crying. That is why it is important to have moments of privacy each day, in order to think about the loved one and notice the feelings that emerge. This is particularly beneficial for those who are conflicted with showing their feelings to others.

4. Adapt to an environment in which the deceased is no longer

Many times, we are not aware of the role or roles played by the deceased, until sometime after his death. Therefore, whoever goes through grief must develop new skills, assuming these roles or assimilating that another person performs them.

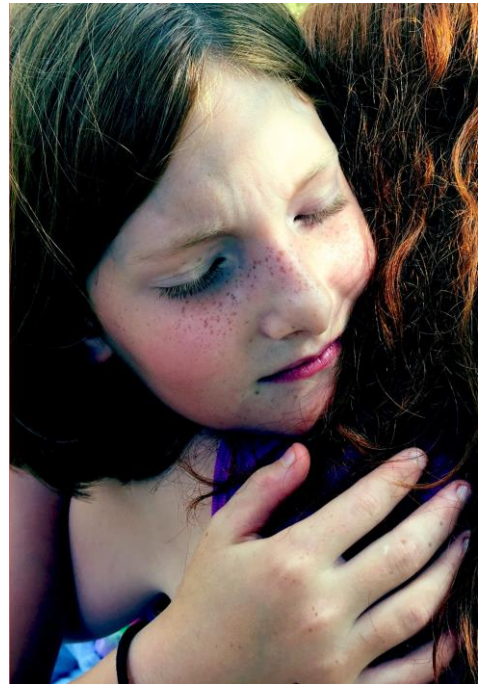
In this way we learn to be alone, to decide without the deceased person, as well as to carry out activities that the deceased previously performed or that were shared with him/her. Even when there is pain, life goes on. Grieving requires us to make amends for the difficulties that arise from the absence of the loved one. It is in those moments when the detachment of someone who has left without giving up their memories should be reinforced, but it does make it more bearable to live without the other person.

5. Let go of the need to control others

We must know that each person who is suffering from loss has their individual way of living it and their own rhythm. We must not intercede in it or demand that they adapt to our own way of assimilating pain.

6. Provide meaning to the loss

It is very difficult or almost impossible to eliminate thoughts about the loss from our minds and, what is even worse, to obsess over it. Trying to banish all painful memories or images will only give them more power. For this reason, it is advisable to mourn, which implies giving a certain different direction to our existence, educating ourselves in living with loss, finding new meaning in our lives and deploying other resources to continue. Sometimes, it is very favorable to connect with a psychologist, since his help can be key in overcoming the loss, or in making the mourning experience less difficult.



7. Find healthy ways to release stress.

Almost by definition, any transition is usually very stressful, which is why constructive ways of managing stress should be sought, whether through exercise or the practice of prayer, relaxation, or meditation.

8. Emotionally relocate the deceased and continue living

We will probably never lose the memories of any of the important relationships that we have throughout our lives.

There is always the possibility that someone who has suffered a duel begins a new romantic relationship or creates other affective ties, although everything will depend on the place in which the deceased is placed psychologically, without necessarily forgetting prior memories. Keep in mind that many people decide never to establish romantic relationships again.

The end of the duel will always happen when motivations to live are found again and we reconnect with our environment and our activities. Solving a duel means feeling better, but for this, the will, the purpose to change, and the courage to do so are very important.

9. Talk to other people.

Talking about your loss with others can help you process your loss and release what you're feeling. This does not necessarily imply that others will give you an answer to what you tell them, but surely the fact of listening to you will alleviate your pain and sorrow.

10. Develop pleasant activities.

It is healthy, as the duel progresses, that we carry out activities that give us pleasure and that we interact with other people. Part of the process of adapting to loss is moving between focusing or not on it, finding ways to be in the world without the deceased person. We can take time to share with friends, watch a movie, walk outdoors, read a book, and if painful thoughts or memories come to mind, just accept them, and try to move forward. This will be very favorable despite your loss.

11. Follow a routine

Creating and maintaining a basic routine of daily tasks can help organize our time, and sometimes link it to other people. Some find it beneficial not to make big changes like moving or getting a new job after a loss, as this may help preserve some “normalcy” and avoid additional stress.

12. Forgive yourself

Another of the most favorable aspects of grieving is being able to forgive ourselves for something we regret having said or done to our loved one, or for what we didn't do or say. This helps to gradually process the pain caused by regret and what was left undone, allowing us to focus more on the most pleasant memories.

13. Find ways to maintain connection with the person who has left

This aspect includes being able to reflect on what was advised to us by that lost person, or watch videos, photos, recall memories and moments of joy, etc.

14. Take care

This factor is also essential, because paying attention to our physical needs after suffering a loss is more than essential. All grief is difficult and exhausting both emotionally and physically. Therefore, we must try to get enough sleep at night, take care of our diet and exercise as much as possible.

15. Join a support group

This factor is no less important, since support groups contribute to the possibility of connecting with other people who have had an experience similar to ours, being able to find comfort, guidance and practical advice in them.

16. Speak to a professional counselor.

Let your counselor share coping skills and mechanisms to help you work through it.

WHAT SHOULD OR NOT BE DONE REGARDING A PERSON WHO IS GOING THROUGH GRIEF DUE TO THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE?

Examples of things not to do?

- ✓ Require those who are going through the mourning to award themselves “a role”, expressing to them: “you are doing well”. It is appropriate to let this person assume the feelings that disturb him without him having the impression that he disappoints us.
- ✓ Tell him what he "has" to do. This supposes a reinforcement to the feeling of invalidity of those who suffer and, even the worst advice that we can give could be "misguided".
- ✓ Say that time will heal the wound. A loss causes wounds that never fully heal, and the grieving process is more active than that phrase implies.
- ✓ Use phrases like: “I can know how you feel”. Actually, it is a superficial phrase, because everyone experiences pain differently, so we cannot even assume that we know how it feels.
- ✓ Try to get the person to hurry through the process of their grief and pain. Everyone also has a different rhythm for it. Usually this requires patience and time.

Examples of things to do?

- ✓ Communicate. If we do not know what is more favorable to say, we can ask questions such as the following: «How are you feeling today? »; “how are you doing? etc. That is, we should try to listen more and talk less. Listening is extremely important and many times we do not

allow ourselves the necessary time for it, especially if it refers to the deepest concerns of the other person.

- ✓ Provide precise assistance and have the initiative to call the person. It is important that we respect their space and privacy, but our help in everyday aspects will also be necessary.
- ✓ Accompany you as far as possible, especially in difficult situations that may arise.
- ✓ Talk about our own process of adaptation to the loss. Even though we all have different ways of coping with these situations, it can be favorable to make this kind of comment.
- ✓ Be patient and allow the bereaved to share their feelings and memories of their loved one.



“Only people capable of loving intensely can suffer great pain, but this needs to love serves to counteract their duels and heals them”

(Leo Tolstoy)