Understanding Grief
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What is grief? Grief is a natural and normal reaction to loss and change. It is a response which is physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual.

When does grief occur? It can occur with any loss or change we experience in our lives. We respond with grief in such instances as the death of a loved one, divorce, separation, moving, losing a job, physical disability, etc. Grief for death is likely to be its most intense expression.

For whom do people grieve? We always grieve for ourselves; for the very real losses that we endure. Sometimes a loss stems from the death or absence of another person; sometimes a loss stems from our own impending death or disability.

What happens when people grieve? The grief reaction of any given individual is highly personal. There is no set list or order of what one should or should not feel, nor is there a certain time frame in which one "gets over it". Grief impacts all aspects of someone’s life; physically, emotionally, psychologically, behaviorally and spiritually.

Intervals of Grief

Understanding the common characteristics of grief can help the grieving person to more effectively cope with their reactions when faced with loss. So often a person is overwhelmed with the sense that they are "losing it" because of how intensity of their grief. Being able to define the intervals of grief can help give someone the "permission" they need to feel what they're feeling and think what they're thinking. There is no normal time span. However, in very general terms, grief can be divided into three intervals: Early Grief, Acute Grief, and Subsiding Grief.
1. **Early Grief** is what occurs when one initially finds out about the death.
   - It can last from a few hours to a few days or weeks.
   - In this interval, the reality of what has happened has not yet registered.
   - A person may experience such things as shock, numbing, denial and anger.

2. **Acute Grief** is the most difficult of the intervals to work through.
   - It can last from a few months to a few years.
   - An overwhelming array of emotions surface during this very trying time. Although the reality of the loss is understood in one's mind, it is often accompanied by pangs of intense yearning for the loved one, spasms of distress, tearful or uncontrolled sobbing, restlessness, insomnia, preoccupation with thoughts of the loved one, or even a constant sense of the presence of the loved one. One may experience a decrease in the ability or desire to function day to day as before.
   - At the depth of grief, one may experience depression.
   - This is when support may be most needed.

3. **Subsiding Grief** is what comes after these first two intervals and is the acknowledgement that this is your new reality without your person and that you must continue to live your life without them physically present
   - Subsiding grief lasts indefinitely.
   - Subsiding grief is not a smooth and gentle path; it is a continuous series of highs and lows, especially as one confronts such things as birthdays, anniversaries, family days and holidays.
   - However, a person is able to begin to: create new life patterns in the absence of the loved one; find reasons to go on living by reinvesting their energy in new things and new relationships; find creative ways to retain the memory of the person who died (this is so healthy).
   - **Those who avoid their grief may never reach this significant and necessary interval.** A person must be patient and give themselves plenty of time and permission to grieve.

**Resources**


Miller, Dr. Dale, (1985?). *Helpful Answers About Grief*. Chair, Department of Religion, Drake University, Des Moines, IA.