

Grieving, Healing and Moving Forward

The pain that we feel when we lose a loved one as a result of death or divorce affects each of us differently and in varying degrees. Loss is a deeply personal experience that we interpret through our unique view of the world and our lived experiences. Many factors including our personality, beliefs, culture and our relationship with the person we lost will determine how we grieve. The range of emotions that we feel often include: denial, anger, fear, hurt, depression, guilt, etc. The intensity of emotions may vary as well as how we choose to express them.

Grieving involves the feeling we experience that are directly connected to our loss. Mourning is the expression of those feelings. In order for healing to begin we need to acknowledge our loss and give ourselves permission to mourn. Although healing is a process and many people move through a series of stages, there is no sequential order nor are the stages clearly defined. There is also no specific length of time for moving from one stage to the next. Oftentimes, emotions that were present at an earlier stage may reappear. But even those moments of regression are evidence that healing is taking place and serve as signals that more work needs to be done at that stage. Just as there is no right or wrong way to express grief, there is no time limit when grief should end. In fact some people may experience a lessening of grief but never get over the loss completely.

One of the most common symptoms of grieving is depression. The symptoms of situational depression are closely associated with a set of circumstances or events often due to a crisis or trauma. It encompasses many emotions and is interspersed with good and bad days. It may or may not require professional treatment. Clinical depression on the other hand, is a more severe form and is associated with feelings of deep despair and hopelessness and may include self-destructive behaviors. This form of depression is serious and in most cases requires professional treatment.

In order to heal and regain a sense of equilibrium and wellness, we need to acknowledge our loss, choose to let go and move forward in a new direction. Surrounding ourselves with people that are understanding and supportive reminds us that we're not alone. Attending grief recovery support groups or workshops allows us to connect with others that are experiencing similar emotions and can provide insight and encouragement. Involvement in the community or in a project geared toward helping others serves to take our attention away from ourselves and our pain and gives us a broader perspective.

Life takes on new meaning as we begin to heal and look toward the future with renewed hope. And best of all, we open ourselves to new experiences and new possibilities.