

Bereavement

Everyone's experience of grief and loss is unique. It is normal to feel sad and even angry when a person close to us dies or leaves. People can experience similar feelings when a relationship ends.

Mourning is a 'cycle of loss' which often includes denial, fear, loneliness, grief, anger and letting go. It is a painful process but allows us to come to terms with the loss. Grief, although normal, can manifest itself differently in people. Some people move through its different stages almost effortlessly and others can get stuck at one stage.

For these there is the possibility of grief turning into depression as the feelings turn inwards to despair.

Symptoms of Bereavement

- Physical pain - tightness in the body, breathlessness, lack of energy
- Confusion, hallucinations, disbelief
- Obsession with the deceased, sleeplessness, lack of appetite

Most cultures have rituals which allow the bereaved to be supported and move automatically through the early stages of their loss in a structured way. Funeral services and memorials fill the early days of shock and disbelief with activity and other people.

For many, decision-making becomes difficult and concentration can be lost for long periods. Anger may be misdirected at relatives, health professionals or others directly associated with the deceased.

There may be an extended longing for the person to return and an inability to accept the loss. If the relationship was a troubled one the conflicting emotions can make the loss even more difficult to bear and result in a guilt which is hard to shift. Professional help may help make sense of the different feelings.

The main tasks of mourning are:

- To accept the reality of the loss and understand its significance
- To work through the confusing pain of grief
- To adjust to life alone – to re-draw our map of oneself
- To let go of the person and find a place for them emotionally

What issues can Bereavement Counselling address?

- It can offer an understanding of the mourning process
- To explore areas which might restrict moving on such as child abuse
- Help resolve areas of conflict still remaining
- Help to adjust to a new sense of self
- Consider if the mourning has turned to depression

Talking about the loss is usually helpful and allows a person to adjust to their new life with all its changes, good and bad. Keeping things bottled up, or denying the sadness can prolong the pain.

Any loss has to be acknowledged for us to move forward. Bereavement means finding a suitable place for the lost person to allow life to continue with adaptation and change, not forgetting or wiping out the memory.

Content written/edited by Denise Pickup BACP (Accred) in 2008. The content is for general information only and may or may not relate to your individual situation; please contact a professional directly to discuss this issue.