



FORT GARRY WOMEN'S
RESOURCE CENTRE

Women, Grief and Loss: Fact Sheet

What is Grief?

Grief occurs in response to the loss of someone or something. The loss may involve a loved one, a job, retirement, a relationship, or a move. Women experience a variety of losses throughout their lives. The loss can be sudden or expected. Everyone experiences grief in their own way. Grief is a normal and natural response to any kind of loss.

How Do We Respond to Grief?

There are a variety of ways that individuals cope with loss. Some are healthy coping mechanisms and some may hinder the grieving process. It is important to realize that acknowledging the grief promotes the healing process. Time and support facilitate the process, allowing for an opportunity to appropriately mourn the loss.

What are Some Common Reactions to Loss?

No two women will respond to the same loss in the same way. The stages of grief we move through reflect a variety of reactions that may surface as a woman makes sense of how this loss affects them.

Her reaction also depends on other things going on in her life. For example, a woman who has experienced other recent losses will have a more complicated grief process. Also, whether or not a woman has other people in her life giving support will affect the grief journey. Experiencing and accepting all feelings remains an important part of the healing process. Some of the common reactions to loss are:

Denial, Numbness, and Shock

- Numbness is a normal reaction to immediate loss and should not be confused with lack of caring
- Protects the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss
- Denial and disbelief will diminish as the person slowly acknowledges the loss

Depression

- Usually occurs after the person recognizes the true extent of the loss
- Sleep and appetite disturbance, lack of energy and concentration, and crying spells are some typical symptoms
- Feelings of loneliness, isolation, and self-pity can also surface

Anger

- Occurs when an individual feels helpless and powerless
- May result from feeling abandoned, occurring in cases of loss through death, end of a relationship or loss of job.
- Feelings of resentment may occur toward one's higher power or toward life in general
- Guilt may result due to expression of the negative feelings of anger

Acceptance

- Time allows the individual an opportunity to resolve the range of feelings that surface.
- Healing occurs when the loss becomes integrated into the individual's set of life experiences.
- Individuals may return to some of the earlier feelings throughout their lifetime.
- There is no time limit for grieving. Everyone has their own healing process.

What Can Delay the Healing Process?

Avoiding or minimizing one's emotions can delay healing. The use of alcohol or drugs can also hinder the healing as they function to cover up the true impact of the loss. Remember, feelings are natural and should be honored to resolve the grief.

Strategies for Dealing with Grief

- Allow time to experience thoughts and feelings openly.
- Acknowledge and accept all feelings, both positive and negative.
- Keep a journal as a record of your own journey of grief.
- Confide in a trusted individual; tell the story of your loss.
- Express feelings openly. Crying offers a release.
- Identify any unfinished business and try to come to a resolution.
- Groups on Grief and Loss provide an opportunity to share with others who have experienced similar loss.
- If the healing process becomes too overwhelming, seek professional help.

Self Care is Important

Self care is important to prevent further stress to the body. The following have been found to be helpful in coping with grief.

- A regular daily routine. Have set times for getting up, meals and going to bed.
- A balanced diet.
- Avoid too much coffee and tea as it can interfere with your sleep.
- Outdoor activities, such as swimming, walking and team games, will produce chemicals called endorphins in the body which help to counteract depression. The exercise does not need to be strenuous.
- Relaxation: meditation, massage, music.
- A relaxing pre-sleep routine: winding down before bed and not watching television.
- Avoiding seeking relief through alcohol, smoking, medication and other drugs.

Where Can I Go For Help With My Grief?

Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre www.fgwrc.ca	477-1123
Age and Opportunity Agency www.ageopportunity.mb.ca	956-6440
Aurora Family Therapy www.aurora.uwinnipeg.ca	786-9251
Beginning Experience www.winnipegbe.ca	275-3090
Compassionate Friends www.compassionatefriends.ca	787-4896
Funeral Homes /Grief Seminars Cropeo Funeral Chapel Thompson in The Park	586-8044 925-1120
Hospice & Palliative Care Manitoba www.manitobahospice.ca	889-8525
Klinik Community Health Centre Suicide Loss www.klinik.mb.ca	784-4059
Manitoba Organization for Victim Assistance www.MOVA.ca	831-8950
North End Women's Centre www.newcinc.org	589-7347
Suicide Prevention Education Awareness Knowledge www.speak-out.ca	831-3610

Resources (Many of these resources can be found in the Winnipeg Public Library)

Brook, Noel. & Blair, Pamela D. (2000). I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye.

Doka, Kenneth. (1996). Living with Grief After Sudden Loss - Suicide/Homicide/Accident/Heart Attack/Stroke

Edelman, Hope. (1994). Motherless Daughters. The Legacy of Loss.

Hambrook, Diane. (1997). Motherloss Workbook. Healing Exercises for Daughters.

Herring, Laraine. (2005). Lost Fathers. How Women Can Heal From Adolescent Father Loss.

Kohn, Ingrid. (2000). A Silent Sorrow, Pregnancy Loss: Guidance and Support For You and Your Family.

Kroll, Cheryl. (2008). Healing Complicated Grief. Reflections & Exercises to Mourn the Loss of Those Who Loved & Hurt Us.

Kolf, June. (2002). Standing in the Shadow. Help and Encouragement for Suicide Survivors.

Kueelbelbeck, Amy. (2003). Waiting With Gabriel. A Story of Cherishing a Baby's Brief Life.

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. (2007). Finding the Meaning of Grief Through The 5 Stages of Grieving.

Levine, Steven. (2005). Unattended Sorrow. Recovering From Loss and Reviving the Heart.

Mander, Rosemary. (2005). Loss & Bereavement in Childbearing.

Moreland, Doris. (1997). Not 1 Bird Stopped Singing. Coping with Transition & Loss in Aging.

Rich, Phil. The Healing Journey Through Grief.

Simon, Clea. (2001). Fatherless Women.

Snyder, Jane, E. (2005). Job Loss. Although It's an Ending Will it Be a Beginning?

Viorst, Judith. (1986). Necessary Losses.

Whipple, Vicky. (2006). Lesbian Widows. Invisible Grief.

Wolfelt, Alan. (1992). Understanding Grief.

Zonnebelt-Smeege, Susan. (1998). Getting To the Other Side of Grief. Overcoming the Loss of a Spouse.

Other Resources Online

General Grief Support

<http://www.griefworks.com/> Provides grief support to those in need of information and resources.

www.livingwithheart.com Provides information and support for people recovering from life-changing adversity.

Grief Cause by Job Loss/Retirement

www.orderofsaintpatrick.org/PDF/grief-loss-teach.pdf Information booklet online from Kansas State University on moving through grief caused by job loss, called, *Learning to Live Through Loss*.

Empty Nest Grief

www.swedish.org/16246.cfm Information for women who are feeling loss due to grown children leaving home.

www.helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss.htm An article recognizing the importance of noticing the feelings of loss

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