

Bereavement and Beyond: Building Resilience in the Face of Loss

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

In the course of our lives, everyone encounters loss, a statistic that reveals 1 in 5 children faces the death of someone close before turning 18. Grief and loss emotions extend beyond death, arising from severed relationships, pregnancy, pet loss, or job changes.

The emotional response to any loss grief becomes overwhelming when someone loses someone or something valuable—whether a loved one, job, pet, or financial stability. Grief affects us mentally, emotionally, and physically, leaving individuals feeling sad, hopeless, isolated, irritable, and numb. Healing is a unique process; patience is crucial as everyone copes differently. In supporting grieving individuals, communication is critical, as others may avoid it due to uncertainty about providing help.

Grief lacks a prescribed path, stages, or rules, as individual experiences vary based on personality, culture, and beliefs. Common symptoms include shock, sadness, guilt, anger, fear, and physical manifestations like fatigue and insomnia.

Coping involves continuing to do what is in front of you- going to work, taking care of yourself, caring for other family members, thinking of them daily, crying when you need to, and really grasping that you are not alone. Even though you don't feel like it, don't want to, and don't believe you have the energy for it - connect with others.

Seeking company and support from friends, family, faith, or bereavement groups can help keep you from getting isolated and withdrawn. Even though you may think this is precisely what you want to do, it is not helpful and increases the probability that your grief will turn into depression.

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Caring for yourself through grooming, eating, sleeping, and exercising is crucial for surviving this difficult time. Using your unique interests and skills can also help you through this process. If you are a gardener, garden--even if it's winter and you have to tend an indoor garden of potted plants. If you are creative, draw, sketch, paint, collage, sew, knit, decorate, write, or engage in creative endeavors. Watch a movie or read a book that makes you laugh out loud.

If you need help identifying or coping with your feelings, unresolved issues, or profound sadness, get some help. Professional counseling, your spiritual advisor, a grief support group, and your friend that went through a similar loss can be excellent sources of comfort and help.



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