

# Re-store: *Grief and Loss*

*“I had my own idea of grief. I thought it was the sad time that followed the death of someone you love and you had to push through it to get to the other side. I am learning that there is no other side. There is no pushing through anything but rather an absorption. Adjustment. Acceptance. And Grief is not something you complete, but rather, you endure. Grief is not a task to finish and move on, but an element of yourself, an alteration of your being. A new way of seeing. A new definition of self.”* By Gwen Flowers

Grief is a normal and natural reaction to something a person has lost. It is a personal process and experience that is filled with a variety of emotions, usually overwhelming and unexpected. These emotions may remain constant for a period of time or change on a daily basis. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and the way we grieve can depend on multiple factors like culture, personality, life experiences, faith as well as the significance of the loss.

## What is a loss?

A loss can entail many different kinds of events which a person then associates with grieving. Examples can include:

- The ending of an important relationship (divorce, breakup, friendship ends)
- The death of a loved one
- Losing a job or financial security
- A miscarriage
- Retirement
- Death of a pet

- Losing your physical health
- Failing at school/studies/job
- Giving up an addiction.

## The grieving process:

In 1969, psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, identified “five stages of grief”:

**Denial:** It is to be expected that a person would deny the reality of the loss as they experience a state of shock and disbelief – “This can’t be happening to me.”

**Bargaining:** At this stage a person seeks understanding of what is happening. They try to bargain in vain to change the past, wondering how things would’ve been different – “if only...” They spend a tremendous amount of time searching for answers to questions that might never be found. “Why me?”

**Anger:** Being angry allows for the release of bottled up emotions. A person may lash out and lay blame to others for the loss they are experiencing – “How can she/he leave me like this?”

**Depression:** During this stage a person realises the true magnitude of the loss. It can be an overwhelming time filled with feelings of hopelessness and helplessness – “I am too sad to do anything.”

**Acceptance:** During this time a person experiences a sense of hope and learns to accept the reality of the loss – “I am at peace with what happened.”

When a person experiences a loss, it is helpful to realise that your reaction is natural and that healing will come on its own time. This is what Kübler-Ross said in her last book before her death in 2004 about the five stages of grief: “They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grieving is as individual as our lives”. It is important, whatever your grief experience, to practice self-compassion and to be patient with yourself.

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## Myths and facts about grief and grieving

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Helpguide.org has identified the following:

**MYTH:** If you ignore the pain, it will go away.

**FACT:** For healing to occur it is necessary you face your grief and actively participate in the process. Trying to ignore the pain and avoiding it will only make it worse in the long term.

**MYTH:** You need to “be strong!”

**FACT:** Allowing yourself to express your feelings e.g. sadness, fear or hurt does not mean you are weak. Showing your true feelings can help others and yourself through the process.

**MYTH:** If you don't cry, it means you are not sorry about the loss.

**FACT:** Crying or being tearful is just one of many ways a person can express their sadness. People have different ways of showing their feelings.

**MYTH:** You should only grieve for a year.

**FACT:** There is no set timetable to grief. When a person feels like grieving that is the time to do so. How long it takes is unique to each individual.

**MYTH:** Moving on means forgetting about the loss.

**FACT:** Moving on means accepting the loss. Keeping the memory of

someone or something you have lost as an important part of you supports you in finding a new definition of self.

## Coping with loss and grief

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**Me time** – practicing self-compassion and caring for yourself during this time is extremely important.

**Exercise** – Keeping active allows your body to produce endorphins which helps you to cope with stressors during this time.

**Eating healthy** – Looking after your body through eating healthy is important. Drinking lots of water and eating a balanced diet will help your body keep its energy levels to cope with the loss.

**Turn to friends and family members** – Spend time with friends and family, lean on those who care about you.

**Draw comfort from your faith** – Should you practice a faith embrace the comfort its mourning rituals can provide. Activities such as praying, meditating or going to church can offer solace.

**Rituals and remembrance** – Actively remembering what you have lost e.g. memory book, lighting a special candle, plant a tree, etc can be meaningful in the process of grief.

Despite a person's resilience,

grief can test us in extreme ways. Grief support can help individuals to develop a meaningful way to skilfully manage emotions and thoughts as well as paving the way towards healing. Should you need to talk to someone about your loss and grief please contact us at Re-centre or visit our website for further information on our workshop Re-store: Grief and Loss.

## About Kahn Higgs

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*Kahn is a clinical psychologist who specialises in working with clients who might find coping with everyday life challenging – depression, anxiety, loss and grief, relationships and adjustment.*

Contact us:

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## References:

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