

GRIEF

Grieving is normal following trauma

Whether or not a traumatic event involves death, survivors must cope with the loss, at least temporarily, of their sense of safety and security. The natural reaction to this loss is grief. Like people who have lost a loved one, trauma survivors go through a grieving process. This process, while inherently painful, is easier if you turn to others for support, take care of yourself, and talk about how you feel.

Losses Which are Grieved After an Abusive Relationship Ends

- Independence
- Security
- Intimate Relationship
- Support of Family and Friends
- Social Networks
- Hope
- Belief Systems
- Trust
- The Happy Ending
- The parent they were supposed to be.
- The life your children were supposed to live.
- The future that you will have in an abusive relationship.
- The future you expected to have.
- The way it was.
- The way you wish it had been.
- The person you thought they were.
- The person you expected them to be.
- The relationship you deserved to have.
- The life you were supposed to lead.
- The person that you were before the abuse.
- The person you wish you had been the first time the abuse happened.

Things that may Help Grief:

- Read and learn about grief. *See the back-side for some basic information.*
- Allow yourself to mourn loss.
- Recognize and acknowledge the emotions. Express them if possible.
- Use ritual as a method for acknowledging and recognizing the grief experience.
- Remember that crying is a normal healthy response to hurting. Tears release a hormone that is relaxing, so each set of tears runs its own course.
- Talk to someone who will listen, be non-judgmental, and who understands your experience of domestic violence.
- Accept that grief can be a long process. It's not possible to wipe away pain and hurt quickly, or in a structured way. Be patient with yourself.
- Mark change or movement since the loss.
- Recognize lessons learned in the experience.
- Don't idolize the violence or abusive relationship.
- Find and practice ways to connect with yourself and to care for yourself.
- If you are finding it hard to make change or movement on your own, please speak with a doctor or a counselor.

The 5 Stages of Grief:

- Denial: “This can’t be happening to me.”
- Anger: “Why is this happening? Who is to blame?”
- Bargaining: “Make this not happen, and in return I will ____.”
- Depression: “I’m too sad to do anything.”
- Acceptance: “I’m at peace with what happened.”

Other Stages of Grief:

- Guilt: “I didn’t do enough to prevent this.” “I’m so shamed and embarrassed this happened.”
- Relief: “It’s finally over.”

Truth about Grief

The same way grief is unique as our fingerprint, how the stages will occur in someone’s life is also unique to them. The stages don’t happen in any specific order; Not everyone goes through all stages; And, we often go through stages multiple times. The stages reflect where we are and identify different emotions that naturally occurs after loss and change.

The emotions are complex -- the stages are general emotions that contain many other emotions. For example, Denial also contains shock. Anger contains rage, bitterness, and annoyance. Bargaining is the “if only’s” and the “what-if’s.” Depression contains sadness, despair, emptiness and yearning. Acceptance just means you acknowledge the reality of the loss. It does not mean you’re okay with it or you like it. Guilt contains shame and embarrassment. Relief contains peace, joy, respite, and liberation.

Grief can be a Roller Coaster

Instead of a series of stages, we might also think of the grieving process as a roller coaster, full of ups and downs, highs and lows. Like many roller coasters, the ride tends to be rougher in the beginning, and the lows may be deeper and longer. The difficult periods should become less intense and shorter as time goes by, but it takes time to work through a loss. Even years after a loss, especially at special events such as a family wedding or the birth of a child, we may still experience a strong sense of grief.

Sometimes Grief is Disenfranchised

This means it is not openly acknowledged, not socially validated or not publicly observed. It is the belief that you have no right to grieve that loss or to mourn in that particular way. This may stem from lack of recognition of the relationship, lack of acknowledgement of the loss, or the exclusion of the griever.