



**Grief and Bereavement**

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## Grief and Bereavement

Grief is your personal emotional reaction to loss. The loss can be of a person, a pet, a home, or anything that has a personal value to you and your life. Psychotherapy professionals recognise that grief can come at different levels and at different stages of loss. One level of grief is called anticipatory grief. Anticipatory grief occurs when grief is experienced by a person *before* a loss. It is commonly felt during periods of terminal illness of a person or a family member because the loss is imminent and cannot be avoided. Anticipatory grief is also felt by children who experience marital separation where one parent departs the family. Anticipatory grief is also a psychological coping mechanism. It is the mind's way of preparing for loss.

Grief and bereavement are normally terms that are interchangeable. However, often times grief and bereavement are separated by *when* the emotional reaction happens. Grief can be considered to be the emotional reaction to a loss when loss happens; or in the case of anticipatory grief, potential loss. Bereavement is normally the point in time *after* loss. It is important to understand that both grief and bereavement are personal experiences for each person. There is no scientific expectation for "normal" grieving or bereavement periods. People that experience grief and bereavement should understand that their emotional reaction to their loss is a personal experience and should let the natural process of grief happen. Unusual periods or levels of grief and bereavement should only be diagnosed by psychotherapy professionals and should not be diagnosed by making a simple comparison to the grief and bereavement periods of others who have experienced the same loss, or the same type of loss.

## Signs of Grief and Bereavement

Unlike what conventional wisdom suggest, signs of grief and bereavement are not limited to feeling sad or depressed. The first signs of grief and bereavement are those that are personally felt by a person. Often these signs cannot be seen from the outward appearance. A person will need to know these signs of grief and bereavement so that they can reach out to someone for emotional support. In cases of extreme grief and bereavement, a person may recognise excessive or overwhelming amounts of these signs, and may consider seeking medical or psychological support. Emotional reactions to grief and bereavement include:

- Shock
- Numbness
- Sadness
- Depression (excessive sadness)
- Anger
- Guilt
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Sickness



Grief and bereavement can also cause physical reactions and problems. Often the signs of grief and bereavement like sadness, depression, and anxiety, can cause a person to fail to perform daily activities that contribute to their overall health. Anxiety and fear, for example, can cause insomnia. Insomnia is a condition in which people experience sleeplessness. Additionally, failure to properly eat or rest can have negative effects on a person's immune system causing sickness. This is especially common for people with chronic illness. Often during periods of grief or bereavements, their illness or symptoms will worsen.

There are also signs of grief and bereavement that a person can recognise in others that are experiencing grief and bereavement. Some of these signs include:

## Physical Signs

Physical signs of grief and bereavement include:

- **Crying**

A person that is experiencing grief and bereavement may cry more than normal. They may also cry during times where crying seems to be odd and out of place.
- **Sighing**

A person may experience excessive sighing, or may sigh often during a conversation. A person experiencing grief and bereavement may sigh when another person asks them to participate in activities that their grief or bereavement keeps them unmotivated to perform. For example, a person that is grieving or in bereavement at work, may sigh often when asked by a co-worker or supervisor to perform task that they normally would be expected to perform.
- **Headaches**

People who are grieving or in bereavement may have sensitivity to light, sound, or may feel overwhelmed by busy activities. These reactions are also signs of a headache.
- **Failure or difficulty eating**

Someone that is grieving may not feel hunger, or if they do they may not be motivated enough to prepare or even eat a meal.
- **Exhaustion**

Exhaustion means that a person is tired. While a person experiencing grief and bereavement may have trouble sleeping, they may still be exhausted from the emotional stress or the insomnia that they may be experiencing.
- **Weakness**

The feeling of weakness may occur because of lack of eating or exhaustion. It can also just be a reaction to the grief and bereavement.

- **Physical pain**

A person experiencing grief and bereavement may have physical pain. It is common for a person to feel aches and pains in their joints, limbs, and even chest. This physical pain as a reaction to grief and bereavement is where the term "broken heart" originates from.

## Emotional Signs

While most emotional signs will be a personal experience, there will be emotional signs that you may witness when interacting with a person that is experiencing grief and bereavement. These signs include:

- **Sadness**

People experiencing grief and bereavement may be sad to a point that their sadness is apparent in their body language and posture. Physical signs of sadness resemble many of the signs of grief and bereavement. Physical signs of sadness include:

- Fatigue
- Insomnia or over sleeping
- Changes in weight (loss or gain)
- Restlessness
- Digestive Disorders.

- **Frustration**

People experiencing grief and bereavement may be easily frustrated, and may want to give up on a project or task that is otherwise perceived as simple by others. Additionally, a person that becomes frustrated with a task that they have easily completed before may also be in bereavement.

- **Anxiety (Worry)**

Grief and bereavement may have a person feeling anxious or worried about an event that is otherwise worry free. For example, a mother grieving may feel as if preparing a child for school is a worrisome task.

## Grief and Bereavement in Daily Life

There may be many occasions where a loss will cause grief and bereavement. Loss can be of a person, of an object, and often loss can be felt from the loss of an opportunity. Loss of a person can occur for different reasons. Some reasons may be extreme like death, and some may be situational like a move. Grief and bereavement from the loss of a person from death can cause some of the highest levels of grief and bereavement.



A person and a child may also experience grief and bereavement when they lose a person because of changes in the family structure. When a parent loses a child because of changes in the family structure, this type of grief and bereavement is often referred to as "empty nest syndrome". Empty nest syndrome occurs when all of the children of a parent grow up and move out of the home. This syndrome is not medically recognised. It normally fuels the anxiety and worry signs of grief and bereavement as the parent will begin to worry about the safety, lives, and decisions of their children. People that experience empty nest syndrome have shown signs of:

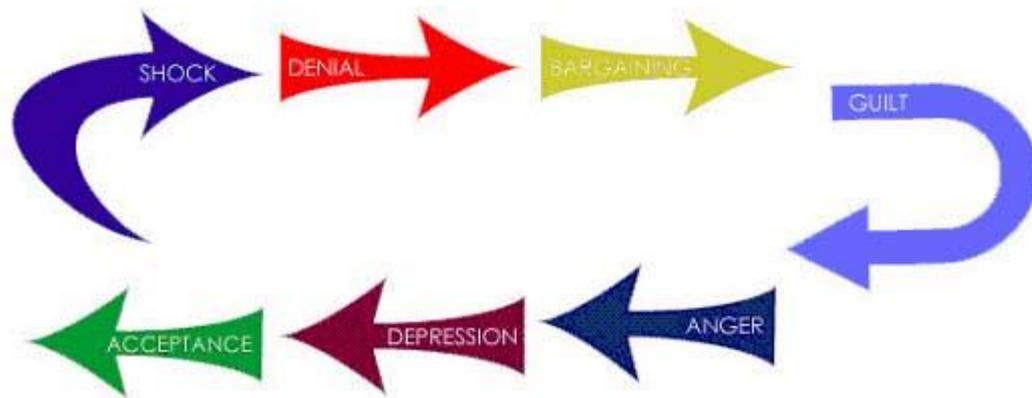
- **Depression**

People that experience empty nest syndrome may feel depressed because of their loss. They may also feel depressed because of their changes in their personal relationship with their child. Feelings of abandonment may fuel depression.

- **Alcoholism**

Alcoholism often occurs with people in grief from empty nest syndrome as they seek out an opportunity to numb the sadness of their loss.

## Stages of Grief and Bereavement



Grief and bereavement for any reason of loss comes in the same stages. The stages of grief and bereavement are:

### 1. Denial

When loss first occurs, people may be in denial. When you hear about the loss of a person or a meaningful object in your life, you may want to see it for yourself. You may want to hear from other people that the loss has occurred. During this period people may think about all the reasons why the loss *cannot* happen to them.

### 2. Anger

After a person deals with the denial that a loss has occurred, and accepts the event, there is anger. The person begins to rationalise who is at fault and where the blame should be placed. During anger the person experiencing the loss will want retribution, or for someone to suffer for their loss.

### 3. Bargaining

During the bargaining stage, the person experiencing grief begins to seek out a way to remove the loss, or to undo the event. Often bargaining occurs between the person grieving and God (or whichever deity that they worship). They want to know what they can do to remove the loss. They often ask what they can do or what they can give in order to get back their loss.

## Family Grief

Dealing with grief and bereavement as an individual may be one thing, but when you are within a family setting, you may find it appropriate to deal with grief as a family. This is especially true when you are a parent. You may have to address the needs of children who are also experiencing the same grief that you are experiencing as the parent or caregiver. Addressing grief and bereavement as a family can be stressful for the family. It can also cause conflict and confrontations that can damage or destroy the family unit and relationship if it is not addressed and handled correctly. Families dealing with grief will have to consider many factors:



1. Each person in the family will experience and cope with the grief differently. It may be difficult to focus on supporting the grief of another person, when you are trying to deal with your own personal grief. Additionally, you may find it difficult to function in daily life, so grief may hinder the care that you give to family members and children. In order to cope with grief, the family may want to consider psychological therapy individually or as a group.
2. An unexpected loss may not only change the dynamics of the emotional health of the family, it may change the daily routines and resources of the family. This is especially true for the loss of person that contributed to the daily survival and resources of the family. The loss of a parent, for example, that contributed to the income of the family may change the family's ability to meet its daily needs or to maintain their lifestyle.
3. Differences in the family's religious beliefs and lifestyles may complicate the dynamic of how grief and bereavement are approached and handled.
4. The support that the family member has outside of the family. Some family members will find support not only in organisations, but also through an employer or a school.

## Psychotherapy Models

Coping with grief and bereavement may require the resource and services of a psychotherapist. A Psychotherapist is a professional who addresses a person's health in their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. A psychotherapist does not tell a person how to feel, but helps a person come to terms with what they are feeling, and then find healthy coping mechanisms to deal with these feelings. Psychotherapists treat patients through:



- **Behavioural Therapy**

Behavioural therapy is used to help people understand their behaviour and its relationship to their feelings. This therapeutic method seeks to help people that are grieving to increase activities that promote positivity, and positive social interactions. Treating grief and bereavement with behavioural therapy includes the following stages:

- **Stage 1 : Self-Monitor**

During the stage of self-monitoring, the person experiencing grief and bereavement is asked to keep a record of their daily activities.

- **Stage 2: Create a Schedule**

During this stage, the psychotherapist and the patient develop a schedule of activities to ensure that the patient has positive or joyful experiences through their daily activities.

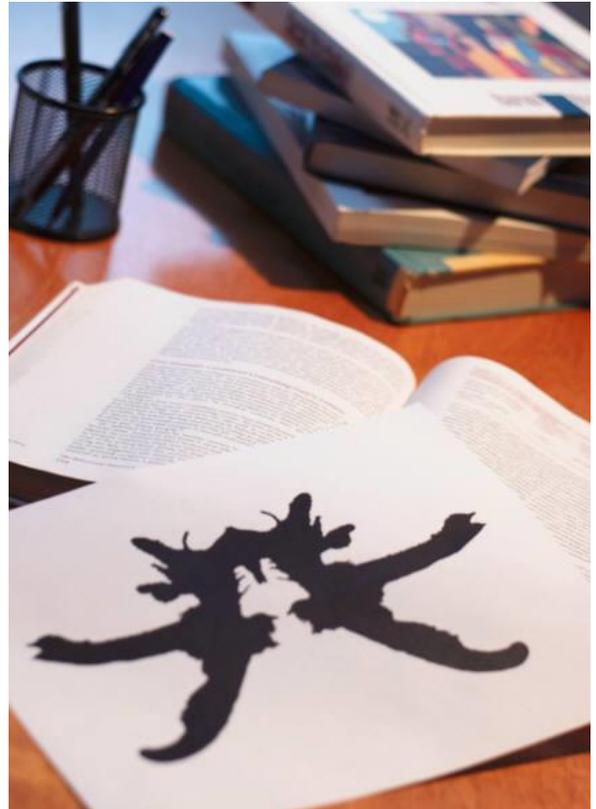
- **Stage 3: Conduct Role Play**

During stage 3 the psychotherapist and the patient may participate in role play so that therapist and patient can develop ideas and skills to address and cope with the social interactions that they may have during this period of grief and bereavement.

## Grief and Bereavement Counselling Strategies

Grief and bereavement frameworks are theories and ideas developed to explain and target resolutions for grief and bereavement. While grief and bereavement are known to be natural reactions to loss, frameworks seek to develop theories as to why it happens and the best systematic techniques to maintain grief and bereavement so that they do not hinder a person's ability to function on an everyday basis.

The Companionship Model of Bereavement is a framework developed by Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt. Wolfelt's framework is founded in the idea that helping others cope with grief and bereavement is in being present in the bereavement period and to witness the stages of grief and bereavement with the person that is experiencing it. In the framework, grief and bereavement professionals and supporters are urged to:



- Honour and focus on the spirit of the person, not just on their intellectual mind
- Interact with the person in curiosity, not just as an expert
- Enter the situation as a person that wants to learn from the griever, not as a person that wants to teach the griever
- Walk beside the griever, instead of functioning as a leader
- Be still in the experience
- Appreciate and nurture moments of silence
- Listen with the heart instead of only analysing the situation as an intellectual
- Bear witness to the person's grief and bereavement
- Accept moments of disorder and confusion.

Other frameworks in grief and bereavement include the theories that conclude that loss also causes internal personal loss. According to these frameworks when people experience a loss, they also lose:

- ***A Part of Themselves***

Most experiences of grief occur because a person is emotionally invested in an individual or object. When that individual or object is lost, the person feels grief not only because of the loss of the person or the object, but also because of the loss of a part of themselves (their emotional investment).

- ***Their Self-Confidence***

Grief and bereavement can cause loss in self-confidence where people may feel as if they have lost an anchor or a source of strength in their life. Additionally, when a person has become a significant part of your life and daily routine for a long time, the loss of that person may affect self-confidence when that person feeling grief feels as if they have lost part of their identity. The greatest example of this is the "empty nest syndrome" where parents lose part of their identity and self-confidence when their children grow up and leave the home.

- ***Family Normalcy***

A loss may change the family dynamics when someone dies, but it can also change the lifestyle that a person is used to. This is especially true for children where they must cope with the changes in the family structure as well as the financial health of the family. Their life is changing in many factors immediately that they may not be prepared to deal with. Children may lose a part of themselves and their family normalcy when dealing with grief and bereavement.

## **Grief and Bereavement Counselling Tools and Strategies**

One of the first tools for grief and bereavement counselling is knowing how to interact with the person that is experiencing the grief. During periods of grief and bereavement, people may be sensitive to the words and actions of others. Additionally, as we have learned before, they may already be easily angered, frustrated, confused, and anxious. Taking actions to ensure that the

- **Grief Resolution Index (GRI)**

The Grief Resolution Index was created by Remondet and Hansson in 1987 as a measurement of the behaviours that are related to grief and how a person finds resolution to grief and accepts being a widow. The index has 7 items that range on a 5 point scale from "very poorly" to "very well."

- **Hogan Grief Reactions Checklist**

The Hogan Grief Reactions Checklist was created by Hyrkas and other researchers in 1997 as a tool that assesses the bereavement process that a person goes through. The checklist has 61 items that measure:

- Fear
- Difficulty in concentration
- Culpability
- Survival guilt
- Panic attacks
- Desire to die

The checklist is scored on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "does not describe me at all" and 5 being "described me very well.")

- **Impact of Event Scale (IES)**

The Impact of Event Scale was created by Horowitz and other researchers as a 15 item scale that assesses how a person responds to stressful life events which include death. The scale has 2 categories: intrusion and avoidance. The scale has 4 points where 1 is "not at all" and 4 is "often."

- **Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG)**

Inventory of Complicated Grief was created by Prigerson and other researchers in 1995 as an assessment of the symptoms of grief and bereavement. The inventory tracks 19 items that fall into either the emotional, cognitive, or behavioural categories.

- **Monologue Questionnaire**

The Monologue Questionnaire was created by Field and Horowitz in 1998 as a tool to measure grief and bereavement that have not been addressed or resolved. It has 15 items that are assessed, and then a monologue is performed. The questionnaire has a 5 point unipolar scale that includes:

- Self-blame
- Helplessness
- Blame toward the deceased
- Non-acceptance
- Being at Peace

- **Psychological Adjustment to Physical Illness (PAIS)**

The Psychological Adjustment to Physical Illness was created by Morrow and other researchers as a continuation of loss assessment. The tool uses a 45 item questionnaire that is taken after an adjustment to loss is made to measure:

- Health
- Vocation
- Domestic environment
- Extended family relationships
- Social environments
- Psychological distress.

- **Revised Grief Experience Inventory (REGI)**

The Revised Grief Experience Inventory was created by Lev and other researchers in 1993 as a 22 item scale of the experience of grief and bereavement. It reviews 4 categories which include:

- Existential concerns
- Depression
- Tension and guilt
- Physical distress.

- **Satisfaction and Bereavement Experiences Questionnaire**

The Satisfaction and Bereavement Experiences Questionnaire was created by Warren in 1998 as a measurement of a person's satisfaction of how grief and

bereavement was handled before and after the death of a person. The questionnaire reviews:

- Hospital experiences
- Personal experiences
- Rituals
- Post-hospital experiences.

- **Semantic Representation of Others Scale (SROS)**

The Semantic Representation of Others Scale was created by Bonanno and other researchers in 1998 as a measurement of the interactions between others during periods of grief and bereavement. Participants are asked to consider 8 positive traits and 8 negative traits of another person.

- **Texas Inventory of Grief (TIG)**

The Texas Inventory of Grief was created by Fachingbauer and other researchers in 1977 as a measurement of the unresolved grief and bereavement of people who have the loss of a family member.

- **Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (TRIG)**

The Texas Revised Inventory of Grief was also created by Fachingbauer and other researchers as a self-reporting measurement of a person's feelings about the events that occur at the death of a person.