

GRIEF 101

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Every adult experiences many significant losses in a lifetime.
The Covid pandemic is increasing these losses.
GRIEF 101 is an introduction to loss, grief and recovery.

It's an honour to be in grief. It's an honour to feel that much, to have loved that much.

Elizabeth Gilbert

Grief is the normal reaction to a significant loss. From the loss of a loved one to the loss of a job or marriage, it is a complex and painful mental process.

Grief is waves of emotion caused by the conclusion of a cherished relationship. Central to it is sadness, sorrow and suffering for the end of an 'affair of the heart.'

Grief has as many forms of expression as there are grievers. Every grief is unique and depends on a range of genetic, cultural, experiential and emotional elements.

The Covid crisis generates many versions of grief including the loss of kinship, jobs, financial security and a predictable future. Covid grief exacerbates other griefs.

Grief has common behavioural responses including reduced concentration, a sense of numbness, disrupted sleep, altered eating habits and diminished energy.

Grief has six phases. They overlap and may not happen in this order. *Denial. Anger. Bargaining. Depression. Acceptance. Meaning.* Acceptance is where resilience lies.

Grief is often conjoined with guilt. The dictionary definition of guilt implies "intent to harm." If there was no intent to harm, guilt should not be an issue.

Grief is a perspective-changing pilgrimage. You are a sailor, landless, disconnected. You must build your own ship, make your own chart, recalibrate your compass.

Grief recovery means feeling better and finding new meaning in living. It is hard work requiring focus, open-mindedness, endurance, candour and courage.

Grief recovery includes being deeply grateful for the gifts of love and learning from the person or place. Memory of these gifts contribute to moments of joy.

Grief recovery includes patience, compassion and realizing that it is survivable. Your task is to feel the sadness and anger. Embrace the honour of grief.

Grief recovery includes getting enough sleep, eating real food and exercising. Safe-guard yourself so you can support the kind hearts who depend on you.

Grief recovery means 'naming and claiming' the grief. Write your losses in a journal. Record your previous experiences, emotional stressors and coping skills.

Grief recovery includes reaching out to help others. Pay passionate attention to their unspoken needs. Perform excessive acts of kindness. Sprinkle gratitude dust.

Grief recovery includes knowing when you are chronically affected and need professional help from a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Grief recovery is enhanced if you pay it forward it to the next generation, preparing them for future significant losses.

The narrative we construct around what happens to us is ultimately up to us. No matter how terrible what happened, it is still our choice to understand our story as one of crippling defeat or a miraculous victory against the odds — even if all we learn to do is to get back up and learn to stand again.

Marcus Aurelius

SOME RESOURCES: The American Psychological Association, Mayo Clinic.org, Canadian Psychology Association, health.harvard.edu, British Psychological Society.

Dr. Joe MacInnis studies the psychology of working in high-risk environments. He's collaborated with the U.S. Navy and Canada's Special Forces. He's currently analyzing the psychological impact of the Covid crisis.