

Grief: How can someone help those grieving?

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Grief and loss are universal, and they are unique to each individual. They virtually touch every human being at some level. While some experience the effects of it more than others, inherently, it is inescapable, and it has to run its course. Every one develops a set of characteristics from their own culture to cope with life crisis, including grief and loss.

Grief is "the cognitive and emotional process of working through a significant loss. The removal of anyone or anything that has emotional value to an individual will precipitate a grief reaction." A grief-stricken person may not know how to grieve and what to anticipate. They may be flooded with many questions and may wonder if it ever goes away. Some may be in shock and need permission to begin the grieving process.

While one cannot control the waves of emotions associated with grief, one can choose when to cry. Moreover, when a person is grieving, he or she

is grappling with what has changed in their lives. After experiencing a loss, a person has to relearn their way of life and the way he or she views the world. Grieving periods vary for everyone; it ranges from a few months to many years. Finally, grief is necessary, since it provides a healthy way to address the loss in a meaningful way.

In between birth and death, one may experience many losses. The ultimate loss one can experience is caused by death. Relationship loss is a loss of opportunity for someone to love and share with another person in their life. Everyone, at some point in their lives, encounters this loss.

When it happens, it saturates everything in life, fogs the mind and brings about great confusion. Moreover, some tend to imagine the dead are still alive. It is not uncommon to experience difficulties eating and sleeping. Some may fall ill because of the stress caused by grief. However, there are some positive aspects of grief.

At times, grief can produce growth. A positive example is

taken from the life of Victor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor. He related how a sense of suffering and meaning can be found, even in the midst of a horrific loss. Secondly, having gone through trauma resulting in grief, one may grow spiritually and come to understand or renew a sense of meaning and purpose in life. And lastly, through grief, someone may cherish the bonds he or she has. People of faith often find strength outside themselves from their traditions. Christians, specifically, believe there is a meaning and purpose for all of their sufferings, and there is a Savior who understands that.

In helping grievers, one can first help them realize it is a normal process God has designed to handle the cascade of emotions generated by shock and trauma. As a result, some will know as time passes, they will "normalize" the feelings associated with grief and loss. Secondly, one can help someone navigate through the uncharted territory of sadness and depression. It would be beneficial for a griever to know he or she is

mentally sane, and this sadness will diminish gradually. Third, one can instill hope in others by helping the grievers see there have been others who have learned to live with loss. Finally, one can remind the griever their capacity to empathize will increase through this experience. When they find others who are grieving just like them, they will be able to offer help and hope.

Fort Riley offers a number of resources to those who are experiencing grief because of a significant loss. Contact a unit chaplain, Irwin Army Community Hospital chaplain, Family life chaplain, or behavioral health or a social worker. A grief support group meets regularly at Geary Community Hospital, Junction City.

Additional information can be found by calling Chap. Virginia Lawrence at 785-762-7691. There also is a grief support group that meets from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Mondays at the Seven Dolors Church, 731 Pierre St, Manhattan. For more information, call 785-565-5000 or visit www.grief-share.org/findagroup/search.