## Coping with loss

Loss is an inevitable part of life. During our lifetime we will undoubtedly experience a variety of types of loss, including death of a loved one or a beloved pet, the loss of health, a job, financial security, a cherished dream, or a relationship breakup. With loss comes grief, and the more significant the loss, the greater the emotional impact.

Grieving is a very personal and highly individual experience, and some types of loss are much more painful and intense than other types. With that understanding, in this issue of *Change Your Way to Health!* we provide some suggestions for coping with a personal loss, as well as suggestions for how to support a grieving friend or co-worker.

**Understand what grief is.** After a significant loss, you may experience all kinds of difficult and surprising emotions such as shock, anger, and guilt. Five widely acknowledged stages of grief are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, it is important to appreciate that not everyone goes through all these stages and that everyone grieves differently. There is no 'normal' timetable for grieving. Grief can feel like an emotional roller-coaster ride with the intensity likely to ebb and flow.

**Get support.** The most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. Even if you aren't generally comfortable talking about feelings, it's important to express them when you are grieving. Find people who can be empathetic and accept what is going on with you. If your grief feels like too much to bear, an experienced therapist can help you work through intense emotions.

**Grieve.** In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain and allow yourself the opportunity to grieve. Unresolved grief can lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems. Exploring your feelings and thoughts through writing, painting, music, or other forms of creative expression can be a powerful ways to help heal. And remember, crying is a natural way to help release the hurt.

Take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. It helps to feel better emotionally if you feel better physically. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Avoid the use of alcohol or other substances that numb your pain.



Allow time. Time does heal, but how long that healing will take varies from person to person. Give yourself time before making any major life decisions. Plan ahead for "grief triggers" such as anniversaries or special holidays and be prepared for an emotional wallop which is completely normal.

## Make a change!

When a friend or co-worker is experiencing loss and grief it is understandable to feel awkward and unsure of what is appropriate to say or do. If you are one of these people and would like to be better able to support people dealing with grief, here are a few suggestions:

- Accept and acknowledge all feelings, and let the grieving person know it is okay to cry in front of you.
- Don't say you understand, even if you have gone through something similar, as everyone's experience of grief is different.
- Offer comfort and reassurance without minimizing the loss.
- Be willing to sit in silence if the person doesn't feel like talking.
- Avoid telling them to be strong people dealing with grief can feel very vulnerable.
- Write a personal note expressing your compassion.
- Don't give unsolicited advice.
- Ask what you can do.
- Continue your support after the initial shock has worn off.
- Encourage the grieving person to seek professional help if you see signs of a long-term problem developing.

It is difficult to do justice to the subject of coping with grief and loss in one short article. This is a complex topic that needs to be thoroughly understood. You can find lengthier articles on this topic on the Human Solutions' website. We also have a couple of e-learning courses that might be helpful: Resilience: Facing Life's Challenges with Courage and Conviction, and Taking Control of Job Loss and Transition.

Finally, if you are struggling with a difficult loss, speaking with a professional can help you turn the corner and move forward with your life again. Our counsellors are just a phone call away.



## Keep in touch



We want your questions, comments, and suggestions. E-mail us at changetohealth@humansolutions.ca.

For more information, to book a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services our Client Services Representatives are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

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