

GRIEF

Grief is our emotional reaction to a loss in our lives, one which we are powerless to alter or undo. The twelve-step program of Emotions Anonymous (EA) can help with feelings of grief no matter what their cause.

The situations which create this devastating sense of loss can be surprisingly varied. The most obvious cause of grief is the death of a parent, spouse, child, pet, or other loved one. However, there are many other situations which can trigger this emotion which are not related to death. There is the loss experienced with infertility, divorce, unemployment, retirement, or moving. There is the sense of loss when a child moves away from home. Profound grief can accompany a serious life-threatening illness as we realize we are losing some aspect of our dreams for a loved one or for ourselves.

Even something positive such as starting a new job, getting married, or personal change through growth in the EA program can trigger feelings of grief. Although a new job, a marriage, or other positive changes are certainly welcome, they are the end of some part of our life as we have known it. At these times we expect to be very happy, and feelings of grief and sadness can be confusing.

Change and loss are hard to bear because we have invested great meaning in some other person or thing. We may have done this unconsciously and are surprised by the depth of our grief. If we have placed great emotional value on someone, someplace, or something, we have invested time and energy into that relationship. We have defined our "self in relation to what is now missing. When a relationship is altered or we are no longer able to define our "self by where we work or live or what we possess, it feels like a part of our "self has been torn away. Our identity, the way we know and perceive ourselves, has been disrupted. Grieving helps us redefine ourselves and reclaim a sense of wholeness. Ultimately, grief is all about healing and becoming strong and whole again.

Grieving can be very painful and frightening. It generally consists of a series of phases which range from shock and confusion to regaining our equilibrium. The process is often chaotic as we go back and forth through the phases. Sometimes it seems we feel nothing but anger toward the person or situation we are grieving. We may be dismayed and ashamed of our anger. At times we feel nothing but sadness and we have no direction, but our feelings are all part of accepting our loss and making some sense of it.

In Emotions Anonymous we learn we are powerless over our emotions. No matter how painful it may be, the first and best way to grieve is to allow ourselves to feel our feelings fully. We need to accept our feelings as being neither good nor bad. Feelings have a stubborn habit of not going away just because we deny or hide them. Feeling the pain is an essential part of growing beyond the grief.

There is no timetable for overcoming grief. It takes as long as it takes and the journey is very much an individual one. Some people do not resolve their feelings or "get over it" for years. It is not really a matter of "getting over it." The loss becomes part of who we are for the rest of our lives, but not necessarily in a dominating way. EA reminds us that part of our serenity comes from being able to live at peace with unsolved problems. We are not leaving the loss behind; rather we are building a new identity, a new sense of self — ourselves plus the loss. We have lost our planned future, and now there will be a new one. Grief eventually turns into hope as we form a new and more positive attitude about our unexpected future.

One of the most valuable things we learn in EA is acceptance of ourselves, of others, and of our situation. As we listen to other EA members who have dealt successfully with their own grief, we find they usually have turned to their Higher Power for strength and guidance while working through their feelings. By asking their Higher Power for help to accept these feelings and by working hard at being open about them to others, they have learned to accept the will of their Higher Power. Through the program we find a loving Higher Power who is always there for us even in our time of grief.

In EA we find we are not alone. Everyone faces grief; it is part of life. The alternative to dealing with our grief is to bottle up our feelings in an unhealthy way. It may be helpful to write in a journal or do a fourth-step inventory about the situation which is causing our grief. Writing a letter to those involved in the significant event can get our feelings down on paper and out of the confines of our mind. If the letter is to the deceased, we cannot deliver it but we do benefit from the act of writing. It helps to put those sad feelings into words and our mind is quieted by this choice of activity.

By using the Serenity Prayer, daily meditation, the Twelve Steps, slogans, and EA literature we can work through our grief. Talking with a sponsor or other EA members and going to extra meetings is also beneficial. Helping others by doing service activities for our EA group or community can shift the focus away from ourselves and ease the burden that our grief poses bringing some relief and healing.

The Just for Today's can be of special help during this time. They are powerful recipes for daily living which, if followed, help us get over that scattered feeling when we do not know what is the next best thing to do. Reading them each day and choosing to focus on one for the day can be very healing.

Emotions Anonymous teaches us about acceptance and surrender—qualities which help us cope during this experience. Hearing others share how they have lived through the grieving process and have once again come to enjoy life gives us hope for our future. Eventually the feeling of emptiness eases and gives way to healing. Grief does diminish over time and EA principles help that time be less frightening and out of control. As we are willing to feel our feelings, to strive for whatever forgiveness of ourselves or others may be required, and to use the help of a Power greater than ourselves, our grief can be transformed into new wisdom and hope. We will someday be able to help others when they find themselves caught up in grief. And grieving is about healing — healing the loss and resuming our life with a new depth and appreciation of our Higher Power's plan for our life.