



Loss and Grief: Inevitable Emotions

By Dr. Kate Kominars

People say that the only constant is change. But change has many meanings and implications, and many changes generate emotions. This is true whether the change is a result of a positive event or not. Any change involves, to some degree, an experience of loss.

That's helps to account for why making decisions always involves some degree of loss – the loss of the choice that wasn't chosen. These are the feelings that Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" calls to mind. However, there are deeper losses and greater grief that come to all of us – sometimes early and sometimes later in our lives. With these types of deeper losses, it is essential to spend time and attention to work through the thoughts and feelings that are inevitable. This working through process is called 'grieving' and it is a normal and natural response to loss.

Certainly we grieve over the death of friends and loved ones. We can also grieve over life changes that occur as a result of long anticipated and desired changes that bring with them alterations in family roles, dynamics or everyday behavior patterns. Some examples of situations which may trigger grieving include:

1. Young children starting school
2. Older children going away to school
3. Disability or illness
4. Divorce or separation



The negative emotions that may result from each of these changes are obvious, but there are also opportunities for potential positive developments. Quite often with losses come unexpected opportunities if we can only find the vantage point from which to explore the possibilities or a perspective from which to view the change. There are some expected emotional 'stages' that people tend to experience in the grieving process although the stages are not to be considered as a linear step-by-step, stage by stage road map for everyone. The stages consist of denial, anger, bargaining, despair, and acceptance. People do not experience these stages in the same order. It is also common to experience a 'stage', move to another one, and then cycle back around to a previously experienced stage. This can be quite perplexing and disturbing, but resolving grief takes time and effort. Grief often doesn't resolve itself. The working through of grief involves coming to a place of having incorporated the new condition or reality into your experience of yourself and others. It involves being able to recollect the good times -- the good memories -- without painful feelings of loss, guilt, or regret surfacing. Other signs of resolved grief are when people have found new meaning in their lives; they live without fear of future losses; and they can allow themselves to feel sad from time to time and talk about the sadness without becoming overwhelmed by the emotions.

There are many myths that people have about loss and grief. The greatest myths are that time alone will resolve grief; that talking about the grief will just make it worse; or 'avoid the feelings' and everything will be fine.

The impact of myths about loss and grief can be difficult to overcome alone. Stages may be challenging and frightening to navigate without some guidance. In the midst of emotional distress, perspective is difficult to alter. For assistance in working through loss and grief, the staff of the Office of Employee Assistance is here to help. Please call Dr. Kate Kominars at 305-348-2469 to arrange for a confidential consultation.

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Some additional references are:

On Grief and Grieving : Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross & David Kessler.

Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations For Working Through Grief by Martha W. Hickman.

When There Are No Words: Finding Your Way to Cope With Loss and Grief by Charlie Walton.