



# Loss and Grieving

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Each person is unique, with personal beliefs, ideas and a history of experiences. Sudden, unexpected loss compounds the grieving process and can bring forward other personal losses - e.g. relationship, job/career, family member or friends' death, a personal dream or vision. The loss may not be a family member or even any one you know, but the context in which the loss occurs may cause notable feelings of grief and loss. If the loss occurs in a work context in which there is family like structures, your connectedness with each other may intensify and enhance the feelings of loss or grief. Experiencing such feelings is normal. Difficulties usually arise which one does not pay attention to the need for process and ritualization of loss.

## Sudden Death/Loss:

Numbness is usually the initial human response to sudden death/loss. This is somewhat predictable for an integrated organism like human beings. "I just can't believe it" or "I feel like someone hit me in the stomach" are classic ways in which people express the initial shock related to sudden loss/death. A feeling of unrealness may accompany thoughts about the incident, until some process allows the loss to become felt, real and finality of the loss is finally accepted.

## Emotions

A spectrum of feelings may accompany a sudden death/loss. Helping professionals are sometimes trapped by our knowledge of such emotions, and we arrive at the conclusion that because I "know" I should be able to handle this. Nonetheless, there are no exemptions, so one may feel sad, weepy, angry, and irritable. Being visually reminded of the loss simply compounds the emotions; e.g. going by the site of the loss, seeing a co-worker directly connected with the loss. One may avoid this, thinking that "out of sight is out of mind," or, "If I'm not reminded then I can avoid feeling hurt, pain." Ironically, that is just not the way things work. One may also feel empty, down/depressed, less energy, more visibly emotional when encountering reminders of the loss. Other emotions such as anger and guilt may actually block healthy grieving. Guilt or anger is simply attempts at ritually controlling a situation over which one has no control. Thinking that, I should have done more, could have done more, could have prevented this, " are simply paradoxical ways of being in control. Feeling helpless and without control are not pleasant feelings and usually lead to unbuffered feelings and display of emotions. "Why" questions are usually indications of frustration, anger and/or irritability. Someone or something needs to be responsible for this absurdity, so God, self, a colleague, "*someone*" should be directly responsible for a situation. A 5-year-old child whose 37-year-old father died from MI asked, "Why do people have to get the flu and die?" (Upon inquiry, he revealed that since Dad was complaining of an aching feeling and throwing up, he must have had the flu) Such questions and feelings are normal responses but usually do not lead to effective resolution of the pain from the loss. Likewise, one may closely identify with the situation and feel anxiety, panic or fear that a similar event may happen to us. Persons who are of similar age, lifestyle, and life situation to our own may trigger our own internalization of feelings and cause significant panic or anxiety. In all actuality, it is our own vulnerability that causes us to over-identify and feel out of control. (It really could happen to us.)

## **Grief and Ritual**

In formalizing a loss, one is actually admitting to the reality and in some case finality of the loss. Obviously, Western culture has become very adept at camouflaging the stark reality of loss by death, e.g. cosmetizing, visually softening the impact of death. Nonetheless, formal ritualization of loss is available to us, if we can be creative in our grief. Obviously, funeral rituals allow us to formally ritualize loss, but this is not the only way. In the ER staff sometimes allow a mom to hold a dead child and rock him/her for a while; or on occasion, staff impacted by some real heartfelt situation, will sit together and debrief, supporting each other and as a group acknowledging helplessness, feelings of failure, loss of control. Ritualizing may take the form of lyric, poem or some other expression of grief and pain expressed to the dead person. Others may find help in journaling or using some other therapeutic process to access the pain of the loss. Ritualizing formally as a group, such as asking a chaplain or pastor to assist in a "service" which ritually captures the group's loss, may be helpful.

## **Therapy and Other Support**

The honest facing of one's own vulnerability, fears, pain, sadness may lead to a more formal seeking of assistance from a trained professional. Groups may also decide to encourage its' members to ask for and receive support if one is having a particularly tough time. If distress persists or intensifies, or leads to increased attempts to relieve the distress, (e.g. alcohol, other chemicals, unhealthy rituals or behaviors), CONCERN Services is available to arrange appropriate debriefing interventions and offer assistance to the organization and its people in coping with the aftermath of such traumatic events. To schedule a debriefing or talk with a counselor call: **(513) 891 - 1691** or **(800) 642-9794** or **visit us on the web**

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