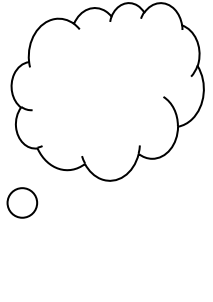


Challenge 9



Grief

Many teens have been exposed to losses on multiple levels. Families are broken due to divorce or death, neighborhoods change, best friends move on. Whatever the experience of loss is, grieving is a part of life that each person goes through in order to heal, both emotionally and physically. There is no easy way to get through grief, but the right kind of support and processing can help us find the path that will help us through our losses.

It is important to acknowledge our feelings when a severe loss occurs, such as the death of a friend or family member. Initially, many people feel completely numb. There is a sense of disbelief. Death feels surreal, as if the moment were happening in another place or another time.

Although some losses feel like they should be less impactful, it really depends on the person and their personal investment. For example, you may look forward to moving to a new city, a different home, or a big school, whereas another teen moving away from where he/she has grown up would feel the changes to be catastrophic. Be replaced.

Our family pets represent another sensitive area for most of us. It can be very traumatic when someone loses an animal that is more of a friend than some human beings. Animals can be just as irreplaceable as people and places that are part of our lives, sometimes more.

Name some of the ways that they can improve the quality of life.

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How to deal with grief

Once the reality of our loss sets in, it often becomes difficult to concentrate on school or work or life in general. People go through many stages of grief, including anger, feeling a sense of injustice and a complete sense of helplessness. We often look for someone to blame. Then guilt seems to set in. In most losses, there are words that were left unsaid and actions that people wish that they had taken, and we begin to blame ourselves.

Physically, it is hard to relax when we are grieving. One feels exhausted but is often unable to sleep. People may experience weight loss or gain, have chronic headaches, upset stomachs, accompanied with low energy and fatigue. Every day efforts seem huge and there is a type of escape in just shutting down. Finally, there are often severe mood swings, where we find ourselves feeling normal at one moment enraged in another, and eventually feeling full of despair.

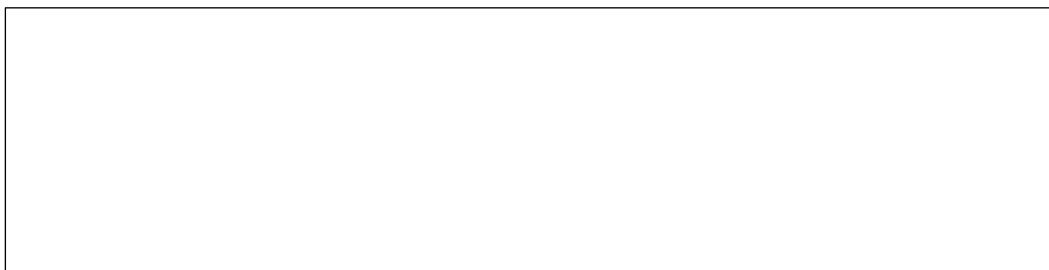
If these feelings don't start "easing up" within a few weeks, a person may be falling into a severe depression. That's why it is important for people to give themselves permission to participate in positive, healthy experiences after the loss has happened. It's important to build some type of healing energy when the moment is available. These opportunities enable us to feel a renewed strength to cope with our sadness and to complete the daily routines and experiences of moving forward.

How can we support someone who is grieving but unable to share the loss?

Why is it hard for people to express their losses?

Using any chemical substances is especially dangerous during the time of grieving. These temporary fixes are only about escape and are always followed with a heavier sadness and deeper depression. Alcohol is a depressant, which means that you might enjoy drinking initially, but your emotional pain will be present the following day, and many times it is worse.

People grieve differently when they face losses. What are some of the ways that you have seen people deal with their grief?



There is never an easy way to get through loss. Teen groups provide a chance to talk about what you're feeling. Shared experiences help the pain. It is also an opportunity to support another person who is going through a difficult time. When teens share an experience that has changed their lives, a community of support will be ready for you.

If you are the person grieving at this time, give yourself permission to be with good friends, go to an event, a movie or a concert. Talk about your loss with someone who respects your feelings. It is important that you find a way to get back into the mainstream of life, and as difficult as it may be, creating a simple positive moment can create the beginning of healing.

Healing doesn't mean that you have forgotten about the importance of the loss, nor does it mean that you don't care as much today as you did yesterday. It means that you are putting your grieving on a shelf in your mind. It is not ever going away and will be there for you to retrieve and remember whenever you choose. However, grieving for your loss does not have to be present every moment of life in order for you to honor your feelings.

There are stages in grieving that are used as a model to describe those feelings that are overwhelming. There is no order in this list. Some people may find themselves trapped in one particular area most of their lives.

ACCEPTANCE

This is time when you process the fact that your world has changed, whether it be because of a person you lost, moving away from friends or family, broken relationships, health issues or other losses. No matter how devastating our experience, we have to move forward.

ANGER

As we try to understand and heal from our losses, we go through various stages of anger. Sometimes, it feels intense and then it may fade, but it is usually present in some capacity throughout our grief.

BARGAINING

This term means that you attempt to find a way to lessen your loss. An example would be to purchase a new puppy to help heal the loss of a family pet. A friend might plant a tree to honor the person. Friends gather together to share positive memories that they want to remember.

DENIAL

This emotion surfaces when our loss feels too great to bear. It works like an anesthetic, calming our emotions as it shuts out the pain of the truth that is too overwhelming. Eventually, the reality will set in.

DEPRESSION

Most emotions surface and retreat depending on the situation, conversation and/or experience. Depression can be alleviated through processing and support but may need to be diagnosed when someone is unable to move forward.

Each person's experiences within the grieving process is unique to them. Just as no two moments in life are the same, no two people will process a death or loss in the same way. Some feel peace or renewed hope after a few weeks, while others may take months or even years before they can let go and move forward as they continue to process their suffering.

Frequently, grief comes in waves, crashing into our minds, nearly suffocating us, and then pulling away as if the memory and the pain were beginning to fade. It can resurface time and again, especially if another kind of loss occurs. One moment of grief can trigger the pain of another.

Sometimes, grief is locked into certain memories that we associate with significant moments or experiences with our loss. Often times, a holiday, a favorite restaurant, a vacation, etc. can trigger those memories that will forever be a part of our past.

Take time to process

1. Talk about and through your feelings. Find those people who allow you to share without reservation and fear. It could be a sibling, parent, neighbor, spiritual advisor, etc.
2. Write down your feelings in phrases or poetry. Many choose to write a letter to the person, whom they lost, sharing their thoughts.

Keep your thoughts as a celebration of your memories. Use them to build upon as you create moments to allow for healing. Encourage others to add to the collection. It can be its own memorial to a past that brings back times of shared happiness.

3. Create a special moment on behalf of the person. Collect pictures, sayings and thoughts for a memory book, video presentation. Write music, create poetry, and display art in celebration of the positive memories in your past. There are no limits to options for processing your grief.
4. Allow yourself to remember. Recall those memories that were positive. Let go of those times that weren't the best. Give permission to believe that each day is a new beginning.
5. Take care of yourself. Eat well. Get some rest. Exercise. It is about rebuilding the whole person, body, mind, and soul together.