



# My Healing Program

## Dealing with Grief & Loss

Any type of loss, whether that of a loved one, a pet, or material loss, is devastating, and can have long term effects on our psyche – manifesting in us potentially not being able to cope with daily activities.

I do offer grief coaching at a very reasonable fee, and if you would like to undergo such coaching, please do contact me at [merrill@myhealingprogram.com](mailto:merrill@myhealingprogram.com) for more info.

Let's start with a definition of grief.

Grief is...

*“... a reaction to any form of loss that encompasses a range of feelings from deep sadness to anger, and the process of adapting to a significant loss can vary dramatically from one person to another, depending on his or her background, beliefs, relationship to what was lost, and other factors.”*

*(Mastrangelo & Wood, 2016)*

Although you may be most familiar with the idea of grief as a response to the death of a loved one, the definition given here is broader: “... it is a reaction to any form of loss” (emphasis mine).

Thus, grief is something that can be experienced in a wide range of situations, including the death of a loved one or a pet, the dissolution of a marriage, estrangement with a family member, retrenchment/being laid off at work, loss of an item which is of sentimental value to you, or any other kind of significant loss.

Grief coaching is intended to help the client grieve in a healthy manner, to understand and cope with the emotions they experience, and to ultimately find a way to move forward. This can be accomplished through various therapies (counselling), or coaching, which tends to be more action-oriented than counselling, but is based on similar principles

A well known model of grief is that of **Elisabeth Kübler-Ross'** popular **“Five Stages of Grief”** model. Her research had shown her there are five stages:

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

Although she initially proposed everyone goes through each of the five stages once and only once, she later acknowledged that some people may experience only a couple or few of the stages directly after the loss, however, could experience them, and other stages later in life.

Another popular model comes from **J. William Worden**, who proposed humans must undergo **the “Four Tasks of Mourning”** to heal:

1. To accept the reality of the loss
2. To process the pain of grief
3. To adjust to life without the deceased, and
4. To maintain an enduring connection to the deceased while moving on with life

Although there are many unique theories and models of grieving with different stages and processes, generally all models agree that the following symptoms are common, irrespective of the order in which they may appear:

- Shock, disbelief, feeling numb, and denial that the loss occurred
- Sadness, despair, loneliness, a feeling of emptiness
- Regret, shame, or guilt
- Anger, resentment
- Fear, anxiety, insecurity, and a sense of helplessness
- Physical symptoms like weight loss or gain, extreme tiredness, (even bordering on exhaustion), nausea, feeling faint or lightheaded, aches and pains, night sweats, heart palpitations, or insomnia

It's normal to experience these symptoms, but if you are experiencing them very intensely or for a long period of time after suffering the loss, you may want to look into grief coaching, counselling or therapy.

## **Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: What's the Difference?**



Both counselling and therapy use discussion between the client and a qualified mental health professional (Psychologist [therapist], Counsellor, or Psychiatrist [dispenses medication]) to help the client address emotional, mental, or behavioural issues and solve problems.

Counselling is mostly used to refer to sessions focused on aiding clients who are dealing with everyday stressors and looking for ways to cope with issues and problems within the 'standard (usual/normal) range of emotions, while therapy is more frequently used to describe sessions in which clients are battling with more serious, and/or more chronic problems, like depression, anxiety, addiction, or more pervasive emotional or behavioural patterns.

The Coach (certified in their profession, not in the medical field), will provide specific activities for the client to do which will help them move through the various stages of grief, and allow the client to find their own path to processing their healing. This fulfils them, realising they are in control of their emotions, and they have the mental power and emotional strength to overcome any difficulties in life, including loss.

The main goal of all of these are to help the client accept the reality of their loss in their future, helping them to maintain a healthy bond to the loved one they lost (**Neimeyer, 2013**). According to **Dr. Robert A. Neimeyer**, an active clinical psychologist and expert in grief therapy, there are two important first steps for working with a new client reeling from their loss:

### **1. Processing the Event / Story of the Death or Loss**

They will encourage the client to engage in re-telling of the loss. They must create a safe space for the client to build trust and be open to sharing, so when the time comes to help the client rewrite the story of their loss, they will also be able to communicate effectively with the coach/counsellor.

### **2. Accessing the Back Story of the Relationship**

In addition to hearing about the actual loss event, the coach/counsellor will also enquire about the client's relationship with the loved one they lost. As **Neimeyer** says, "Death may end a life, but not necessarily a relationship." They will guide the client through learning how to reconstruct their bond with their loved one rather than relinquishing it (**Neimeyer, 2013**).

This applies to items, work, or businesses lost as well – we also create lasting bonds and identities with these as they have an emotional tie to us in some way or another – whether that be security, trust, reliability, dependability, familiarity or others.

Once you've got the basics covered, you can move on to some grief-specific techniques. For more info on my grief coaching module, please contact me at [merrill@myhealingprogram.com](mailto:merrill@myhealingprogram.com)

## **Coping with Grief**



In addition to the techniques and strategies listed above, counsellors will likely also offer the following three tips for those who are grieving.

### **1. Do not grieve alone**

It's vital that you stay connected with others during this time. Your support system may include family, friends, leaders in your faith, a bereavement support group, and/or a licensed mental health professional to help you cope.

## **Your support system can help you:**

- Find peace and comfort through your faith's mourning rituals
- Make funeral arrangements or help you with new tasks or responsibilities
- Share your grief with others who can relate
- Work through your difficult emotions in a safe setting

## **2. Self-care is especially important at this time**

It can be easy to forget about our own needs when we are reeling from loss, and trying to support others in their time of need. However, neglecting yourself doesn't help you deal with your grief any more effectively if you don't take that much-needed time to be still, and allow yourself to come to terms with what has happened.

### **Remember to:**

- Do something creative to express your feelings (e.g., sing, write something, paint, put together a scrapbook or photo album, play a musical instrument, or gather together small items that will help you remember the good times and memories you have of the person)
- Eat, sleep, and exercise to avoid adding physical fatigue to your emotional fatigue
- Be patient with yourself and allow yourself to feel whatever you feel
- Understand what triggers your grief and prepare for them (e.g., if you are working, plan to take a few days off, of work, let your friends and family know you'll need extra support, etc.).

## **3. Before You Do Anything Else: Stop the Action**

If you have your own business, or manage a team at work,

The very first step, that should be taken immediately following a death, is to call a halt to business as usual. Leaders should pause all nonessential activities and reschedule them to allow employees to process what has happened.

This may involve closing the business for a day or gathering all employees for a few hours to let them know what happened and address anything that needs addressing (e.g., safety concerns). Leaders should ensure that all employees are aware of the situation and leave with accurate information.

## **4. Focus on Feeling/Talking/Sharing**

After the initial gathering to discuss what happened and make sure everyone is up to date, make some time for employees to gather and share their feelings. It is imperative to give employees a chance to work through their feelings and connect with their coworkers after a loss.

You may want to invite an external facilitator to lead a group discussion.

In larger organizations, this may need to be broken into several smaller groups; the important thing is that each employee gets a chance to share in a safe environment.

After every employee has had a chance to share, the organization can plan a ceremony or remembrance that includes the entire organization.

## **5. Seek professional grief counselling**

Not everyone will need the services of a counsellor or therapist during their grieving period, but it can be very helpful for those who are really struggling. A qualified professional can help you understand the grief process and give you the tools you need to cope with your emotions.

While everyone grieves differently, these three tips are essential for anyone who must cope with a profound loss.

## **6. Use Differing Formats**

Every individual grieves in their own way, and it's important to avoid imposing a specific type of grieving on anyone. Offer as many different formats of grief counselling or support as possible. Some people may not be comfortable sharing in a group and would benefit from speaking to someone one-on-one.

Others may find ceremonies and rituals comforting, while others may find them over-the-top or overly solemn. Try to offer support for a wide range of coping styles and strategies.

## **7. Create Ceremony/Rituals**

Although some may not appreciate them, most people find some comfort in ceremonies and rituals. The ceremony could be something as simple as having everyone sign a card to the deceased's family, or it can be as big as planning a company-wide memorial service for the deceased.

## **8. Provide Many Opportunities**

Some people take time to process their emotions before reaching out, and others may be in shock or denial for a period of time. Make sure to offer multiple opportunities across a longer time period instead of designating a single day or week as the time to grieve. Give employees every opportunity you can to work through their feelings.

### **Support Persons**



Just as people grieve in different ways, they turn to a variety of people for support.

Some prefer to speak with loved ones, while others may want to sit down with a mental health professional. Many people benefit from speaking with those in a position of authority in their organization or to a religious figure, like a pastor, priest, or rabbi. Still, others might be comfortable talking to a volunteer that they

do not know, but have no desire to share their deepest thoughts and feelings with co-workers or managers. Try to secure many different types of people as helpers for your employees as they grieve (**Rothman, 2010**).

At least some of these helpers should be mental health professionals external to the organization. They can provide objectivity and a promise of confidentiality for employees, allowing them to be honest and open (**Lotich, 2017**).

## **9. Rebuilding Your Routine**

If you lived with the person who has passed, or if dealt with them regularly in certain areas of your life, it may be difficult to approach certain spaces or activities without them. It can also be stressful to take on tasks they may have done previously

If, for example, that person managed your finances or aspects of your home environment, you may need to take on those roles yourself, or acquire help from an expert in that field.

A counsellor or coach can help you address any anxiety that may arise as a result of needing to take on this extra responsibility, working with you in creating a plan to tackle them at a pace you're comfortable with, and building new routines.

## **10. Redefining Your Identity**

When you lose someone very close to you, like a partner, family member, or even through a miscarriage, you may feel as though you have lost a certain part of your identity as well.

Coaching or counselling can help you redefine your identity by finding a way to focus on, or discover other interests or parts of you long forgotten from your past.

It can also equip you with the skills, and subsequent new-found confidence that comes with that, to try new hobbies, reach out to new people, and build a support system for yourself. You may also find you are comfortable taking on a new identity, such as 'single parent', 'widower' or 'only child', if your siblings have all passed on.

**Coaching or counselling for children, students, seniors, those suffering from a miscarriage or loss of a child, or those suddenly losing physical or mental capacity is more specialised, and might require a therapist / counsellor versus a coach.**

If you, or someone you know, requires grief coaching, feel free to contact me at  
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