



## ***UNDERSTANDING AND COPING WITH LOSS***

Sadness. Anger. Guilt. Anxiety. Loneliness. Fatigue. Helplessness. Shock. These are all emotions that are commonly associated with a person who is in mourning. Grieving is a natural and necessary process that you will likely experience at one point in your life after a loss. Grief, which is not exclusive to death, may be experienced through various types of losses -- for example, a divorce or relationship break-up, a job loss, or leaving one's family and friends. Part of the problem with grieving rests within ourselves, i.e. we tend to make it a lonely experience -- something we feel we have to do on our own, sometimes rejecting the support of others. A second problem involves our tendency to deny or minimize the impact of the loss, which limits our ability and willingness to grieve. According to Dr. J. William Worden there are, in fact, certain tasks of "mourning" that must be accomplished for equilibrium to be re-established and for the mourning process to be completed.

**TASK I: TO ACCEPT THE REALITY OF THE LOSS.** Coming to terms with the fact that there was a loss is often the hardest task for the mourner. People may try to protect themselves from reality by denying that the loss occurred. It is very normal to hope that you can reverse the situation, however, for most people this is a short-lived illusion and once they accept that they have suffered a loss, they are able to move on to the second task.

**TASK II: TO EXPERIENCE THE PAIN OF GRIEF.** It is necessary to acknowledge and work through both the emotional and behavioral pain associated with loss or it will manifest itself through symptoms or other forms of aberrant behavior. Very often you may be confronted with people who can not deal with your situation and therefore give you the messages, "You don't need to grieve," or "You should be over this by now." This reinforces your own defenses, leading to the denial of the need to grieve. By not working through the pain you are telling yourself not to feel, when you should allow yourself to experience the pain, to feel it and to know that one day it will pass.

**TASK III: TO ADJUST TO THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THERE WAS A LOSS.** The coping strategy where is to re-define the loss in such a way that it can work to your benefit. For example, losing your job may mean that you are temporarily unemployed, but it may also be a perfect opportunity for you to change careers, go back to school or travel. Failure to adapt to your loss can be crucial. Often, people will work against themselves by promoting their own helplessness and by not developing the skills they need to cope or by withdrawing from the world and not facing up to reality.

**TASK IV: TO WITHDRAW EMOTIONAL ENERGY AND REINVEST IT IN ANOTHER RELATIONSHIP.** This final task in the grieving process requires emotional withdrawal from the loss so that this emotional energy can be reinvested in another aspect of your life. Many people find this difficult to do because of the risk of re-investing their emotions and energy in another relationship which might also end in a loss. Although this is often the most difficult task to accomplish, once completed, life can be full and rewarding again.

*For more information or assistance:*

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