

Grief and Loss

The loss of someone close is one of the most painful events that someone can endure. The death of a loved one is an experience that most people will encounter various times throughout their life.

Death is one of those inevitable certainties that we will encounter. We often do not think about this issue until we are faced with the reality of death. This is due largely to the fact that death in our society has become institutionalized. This means that it often occurs in hospitals or nursing homes where most of us do not come into contact with it on a daily basis.

In many cultures, death is considered a normal part of life and is accepted, and people of the culture are regularly exposed to it.

Many of us may picture how we would cope with another's death. However, some people are forced to come to terms with their own deaths. For example, someone diagnosed with a terminal illness may experience many of the same emotions regarding their own death as someone else may when a loved one dies.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross was a psychiatrist whose pioneering work in the late 1960s brought light to the emotional reactions experienced by people affected by the death of a loved one or someone facing their own death. She defined the following stages as those ordinarily experienced by people suffering a loss:

1. Denial (shock, "this can't be happening")
2. Anger (blaming, "who is responsible for this?")
3. Bargaining (pleading with God or higher power to bring the loved one back, or to grant more time to one who is dying)
4. Depression (sadness, withdrawal, hopelessness)
5. Acceptance (being at peace with the loss, ability to move on with life)

These stages are not meant to be prescriptive; that is, it is not expected that everyone experiencing a loss go through all stages or in the same order as someone else. One can also cycle back to a stage of grief that they once thought to have been resolved.

What is most important is that support be available to those suffering a loss. With adequate support, the person will feel they are not alone in their struggles. It is important for social supports to remain in place beyond the initial days following the loss, as support often dwindles shortly after the memorial services.

In cases of complicated grief, additional support is available in the form of professional help. This can be offered through the use individual psychotherapy to help those persons understand their emotions and to help make sense of their experiences. Support groups can also be a great resource, as the bereaved will find others who are experiencing a loss.

Contacting a professional can be a good first step and will open the doors to resources available to those suffering a loss.

GARY BREUER, MA, LPC



My private practice is located in North Scottsdale, within the offices of PsychArizona. I work with children (ages 6 and older), pre-teens, adolescents and adults. I work with individuals, couples and families with issues of anxiety, depression, trauma, grief and loss, career, academic and workplace issues, relationship issues, LGBT concerns, personal growth and spirituality.

I use various therapeutic approaches depending on the needs of the client. These approaches include developmental, humanistic, cognitive-behavioral, existential, family-systems, mindfulness-based, transpersonal, and EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). EMDR is a model used for the treatment of trauma, and has also been found to be successful in the treatment of various other disorders as well.

I have experience providing professional counseling in clinical, business, and school settings.

Apart from my private practice, I am also a Reiki Master and have a great appreciation and respect for alternative as well as conventional treatment approaches.

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