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GRIEF & LOSS

We experience many traumatic and painful losses throughout our lifetime. Losses change and shape our lives. The greatest loss we experience and which most of us are least prepared for is when a loved one dies. There are many types of losses, large and small. Individuals respond differently to each event. Examples include:

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| + Death of a family member or friend | + Separation or divorce |
| + Illness, injury or disability | + Loss of a job or property |
| + Children leaving home | + Finances dwindle |
| + Moving to a new place | + Disappointment in a child |
| + Giving up a dream | + Incarceration of a loved one |

What is Grief?

Grief is the most common response to a loss. It is a natural, necessary and complex reaction to a significant change or loss, in our lives. Research has shown that grief can make you more susceptible to illness, cause flashbacks, fatigue, insomnia, weight loss, higher blood pressure and increased heart rates.

The Phases of Grief

Grieving people commonly experience a wide range of emotions and reactions. An individual's reaction can depend on the type of loss, the suddenness of the loss, their personality, previous losses and the presence of support that may be available. The time it takes each person to heal varies but the stages of grief are *commonly* experienced as:

Shock → Denial → Anger → Bargaining → Guilt → Depression → Loneliness-Anxiety → Acceptance → Healing

Strategies for Surviving A Loss

For the mourner:

- Express your feeling aloud – let people know you need to talk about your loss; although they care deeply about you, they may be afraid to bring up your loss. Consider sharing your burdens with trusted friends, a pastor or your family.
- Accept and/or ask for help – identify specific needs: to baby-sit, bring over food, come along side to be present/supportive or help out with house/other logistics.
- Prepare for holidays and anniversaries – try to be with friends and family during these painful times, it is common to experience depression at these time.
- Take care of your physical needs – proper rest, a well balanced diet and exercise can help prevent ongoing physical effects of grief. Avoid alcohol, tranquilizers or other harmful substances. Be kind to yourself – be patient, don't make major decision right away, try to do things you enjoy.

For friends of the mourning:

- Make yourself available – offer both emotional support and practical assistance. Don't be afraid of rejection.
- Be a good listener – listen without interruption, watch and listen for cues, encourage the person to talk about their loss. Touching is OK if done discreetly and both are comfortable.
- Give reassurance – after the initial shock has passed try sharing your feelings but avoid using phrases like "I know just how you're feeling"
- Avoid offering religious platitudes – statements such as "God knows best," implies that the person's feelings are unacceptable.
- Give permission to cry – sometimes people hold back tears, let them know it's all right to cry. This may be especially true for men. And it is ok for you to share tears as well.
- Encourage independence – sometimes a grieving person needs to be reminded that they can handle the responsibilities of a new way of life.

Sources of Help and Information

There are a variety of types (some very specific) of help available after suffering a loss. If you seek help there are many people and places you can turn to including: counselors, support groups, local mental health centers, clergy, social service organizations and other helping professionals. If you would like help identifying possible resources, please do not hesitate to ask a member of our Northern Illinois CISM team. We are glad to support!