

Grief: A Recovery Process

The Tasks of the Grief Process

Chemical dependency is a chemically based disease which creates a pathological relationship to a mood-altering substance. Recovery then can be seen as the loss of this significant relationship. The grief process for dealing with loss can sometimes be helpful in understanding the process that we call recovery. You may find this helpful for your own recovery or for any other unresolved loss in your life.

Dilemma	Task
<p>Denial: the body's natural psychological response to loss.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rationalizing • "Why? Why me?" • minimize ("It wasn't that important") • see lost person (chemical) embodied in someone else (experience, idea, habit) • keep room (paraphernalia) exactly as the person left it • "I drink/use because..." • "I'm not that bad" • "Only certain chemicals are harmful to me" 	<p>Acceptance of reality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the person really is gone and they're not coming back • they really are dead • "I have a disease called chemical dependency" My body handles chemicals differently than non-dependents and it won't change with time" • a drug is a drug is a drug
<p>Feelings: experiencing the pain of loss.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we try to use ways of not having to feel the pain • deny, block, euphoric recall, geographic cures, idealizing the past (people, our drug, drinking histories) • using drugs, alcohol, food, work, sex and other relationships to avoid feelings. 	<p>Let yourself experience all the feelings of grief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any attempt to avoid the pain of loss will only prolong the hurt • this step can be relatively short if you allow yourself to go for it • this is not a bad time to ask others for help • it is a very bad time to get involved romantically

<p>Disorientation: the period of readjustment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feelings of being out of place or out of step with the world • this is where you will find out just what the loss (person, chemical) really meant to you • not sure how to act or what to say in social settings 	<p>Adjust: learn new coping tools to live your life without this relationship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12-Step programs • sponsors • achievement of this task will determine if loss will produce new goals, new roles, or suspended growth, irrational beliefs.
<p>Triggers: people, places, feelings that kick in the automatic response cycle.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • old drinking or using places or friends • dealers • music---certain songs • thinking about the good old days • denial returns • Maybe I'm strong enough now... 	<p>Detach: withdraw emotional energy from the lost object.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking away some of the power we give to feelings • just because you feel it doesn't mean you have to act on it • detaching doesn't mean you loved them less • staying upset doesn't mean you loved them more • now is the time to invest in new relationships

The Norms of the Grief Process

Grieving takes time and like a physical wound the body has a built-in process that will work if we let it. Don't hurry it along, it is all natural and human. Here are some commonalities in the grief process.

Feelings

<p>Anger -sometimes confusing, we often misdirect it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • towards self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ guilt ○ not worth closeness • towards others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ mistrust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sadness • guilt • anxiety: insecurity, panic • loneliness • fatigue • helplessness
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ afraid to love • towards God <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ irrational beliefs ○ loss of faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shock • yearning • emancipation • relief • numbness
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There are some things that can complicate feelings like:

- ambivalent feelings about the person (you loved them and hated them)
- uncertain losses, being in limbo
 - missing in action
 - separation
 - undiagnosed illness
- social stigmas
 - suicide
 - abortion
 - murder

Physical Sensations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hollowness in chest • tightness in chest, throat, neck, stomach • oversensitivity to noise • depersonalization: nothing seems real 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • breathlessness • weakness in muscles • lack of energy • dry mouth
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Thinking Patterns

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disbelief • confusion • preoccupation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sense of presence • rationalizing • self destructive thoughts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ if thoughts become plans and attempts, see a professional!
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Behaviors

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• sleep disturbance• appetite disturbance• absent-minded, forgetful• social withdrawal• dreams of the deceased or using/drinking dreams• avoiding reminders/triggers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• searching or calling out• sighing• restless overactivity• crying• visiting or encouraging triggers• treasuring belongings, paraphernalia |
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Types of Losses

Obvious losses

- death of a loved one
- the breakup of an affair
- separation
- divorce
- loss of job
- loss of money, being robbed

Less obvious losses

- change of job
- moving
- illness (loss of health)
- jail time (loss of freedom)

Losses due to chemical dependency

- loss of family
- self-worth
- goals for your life
- values
- friends
- motivation
- faith

Limbo

- Is it on? or off? Is it a gain? or a loss?
 - awaiting medical tests or reports
 - a couple on the brink
 - a friend or family member "missing in action"
 - lovers after any quarrel
- It's important to know that:
 - not knowing is the worst torture of all

- being in limbo is in itself experiencing loss
- do what you can to get off the fence

When an emotional injury has taken place, the body begins a process as natural as the healing of a physical wound. Let the process happen. Trust that nature will do the healing. Know that the pain will pass and when it passes you will be stronger, happier, more sensitive and aware.

In loss you feel helpless, fearful, empty, despairing, pessimistic, irritable, angry, guilty, restless. You may feel a loss of concentration, hope, motivation, energy. You may also find changes in sleep, appetite or sexual drive. All of this is to be expected. It's part of the process that is natural to your body.

Be with these changes; don't fight them. It's OK to hurt.

The Stages of Recovery

Denial

You can expect to be in shock for awhile. You may struggle to believe and disbelieve that this could be happening to you. It **has** happened. It is real. Recognize that the loss has taken place. You are strong enough. You will survive.

Anger

Even though your anger may not make sense or sound logical, it's important to let yourself feel the full amount or intensity of it. Don't judge your feeling of anger as being bad or sinful or you will probably turn the anger back onto yourself, i.e., guilt, self-pity, depression.

Many people make decisions that affect the rest of their lives when they are in this stage about God: ("He doesn't exist. He doesn't love me. How could God allow something like that to happen to me? God must be vindictive," etc.); or about other people: ("Well, if this is what happens when I get close to people then I will make sure that it doesn't happen again. I won't let any one get close enough to me to hurt me from now on. People can't be trusted."); or about ourselves: ("I must not be worth getting close to. It was my fault that they left. I should have...."). As with other stages, it is important to feel the full extent of the feeling. If you let yourself do this you will hit the bottom of that stage and move on to the next.

Depression

This is the stage that is most often the most difficult to let yourself be with. This is where a lot of people will medicate or do other unhealthy things to rescue themselves from the feelings. Depression will also feel a bit like emptiness or sadness and generally will not

touch your self-esteem. Remember this is grief depression and not other kinds of depression.

There are some things you can do, though, to survive this. Rest and stick to a schedule. No major decisions right now. Let others comfort you. The question of suicide, keep it a question. Be gentle with yourself, no heavy duty expectations. Eat right---no sugar! Remaining distraught is no proof of love. Watch out for rebound relationships. We often use people the same way we used to use drugs. They provide a temporary relief from the pain. Get plenty of exercise and use positive affirmations. Make a list of things you like to do and do them when you're feeling blue. It's OK to be depressed, it's OK to cry, it's OK to be angry. You're human.

Acceptance

This could also be called the growth stage. The worst is now over and now it's time to grow and try some new things. Your confidence may be returning and you may find it easier to be with other people and to like yourself. Praise yourself for allowing yourself to go through the pain without using drugs and/or alcohol. Forgive yourself and others. Take control of your life. Stop blaming others for your losses and accept responsibility for your response to loss.

Remember, too, that most people who are in a chemical dependency treatment program are also dealing with the loss of their chemicals. You can expect that some of these feelings will occur because of that loss. It's OK to be feeling that, but it's really important that you talk about those feelings. Acceptance does not necessarily mean that you will stop having feelings about the loss. It does mean that those feelings will not have the power to control your life in the here and now.