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COPING WITH LOSS

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The classic book on grief— *On Death and Dying*, by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, 1969, dealt with terminally ill individuals. Her theories and stages of grief have since been expanded, depending on the situation

Most basic theoretical stages of grief:

- 1. Denial and Isolation:** shock, numbness, disbelief. “This can’t have happened.” This reaction is a person buying the necessary time to prepare for reacting to a loss.
- 2. Anger:** at being left behind, at the person who left, at the world, at oneself for surviving or not having prevented it. Can include rage, envy, resentment. People may also feel anxious or fearful in this stage.
- 3. Bargaining:** Talking to God. If you’ll just let me live, I’ll _____. If you’ll just bring him/her back, I’ll _____.
- 4. Depression:** sadness, loneliness, crying, decreased appetite, irritable, poor sleep, low motivation, low energy, guilt. You may feel drained.
- 5. Acceptance:** recognition that one’s life goes on

Important things to recognize about these stages:

---- Not everyone goes through every stage.

---- Not everyone goes through them in the same order. Some are skipped, some repeated.

---- Grief is an individual process. Not everyone cries. Not everyone talks

about their feelings.

----- Reactions can be physical, behavioral, cognitive, or spiritual.

----- No one can tell you how to do it. There are no “supposed to’s.”

----- No one can tell you how to feel or not to feel.

----- No one can tell you when to be finished grieving. When they do, it’s usually a reflection of their own discomfort.

Common reactions when someone dies suddenly or tragically may include guilt, nightmares or trouble sleeping, intrusive thoughts or recollections of the person, startling easily, feeling numb, avoidance of anything that is a reminder of the person, physical illness, self-blame.

Sometimes we are reminded of other painful losses we have experienced in the past. These kinds of reactions are fairly common and usually resolve within a few weeks. If these symptoms are present for longer than a few weeks, especially if they are disruptive to daily activities, seeking professional help may be in order.

Basic things to do for self-care while grieving:

1. Pay particular attention to your body.
2. Get adequate sleep.
3. Exercise when able.
4. Eat three balanced meals a day if at all possible.

Many of us neglect our bodies, but our bodies need to be nurtured, especially during times of stress.

5. If you want to talk, talk.
6. Consider getting your feelings out by writing in a journal.

Some people find solace in creating a ritual to honor the person’s memory, such as releasing balloons with a letter attached. Some have buried letters, flowers, pictures, or cherished reminders of the person (but do not bury something you would want to keep).

7. Seek support in friends, families, or professionals.

If the above is not enough, Call Hospice to see what resources may be available, call clergy, or seek professional support from a licensed psychologist if needed.

Recognize that eventually you will feel more like yourself again. Human beings are remarkably resilient. Time heals.

We have several psychologists at *Clinical Psychology Associates of North Central Florida, P.A.* who are trained in handling grief reactions. Please do not hesitate to call if you think it would be helpful. We have offices in Gainesville and Ocala, FL