



STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL'S SPARK PROGRAM



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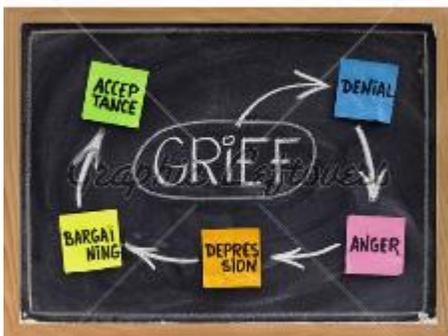
WEBSITE: Stuyvesant HS

Coping with Death, Grief and Loss

Understanding Grief

- **Grief occurs in response to the loss of someone or something.**
- The loss may involve a loved one, a job, or possibly a role (student entering the workplace or employee entering retirement). **Anyone can experience grief and loss.**
- It can be sudden or expected; however, individuals are unique in how they experience this event.
- **Grief, itself, is a normal and natural response to loss.** There are a variety of ways that individuals respond to loss. Some are healthy coping mechanisms and some may hinder the grieving process.
- **It is important to realize that acknowledging the grief promotes the healing process.** Time and support facilitate the grieving process, allowing an opportunity to appropriately mourn this loss.

5 Stages of Grief



1. Denial, Numbness & Shock

- This serves to protect the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss.
- **Numbness is a normal reaction to an immediate loss** and should not be confused with **"lack of caring."**
- **Denial and disbelief will diminish** as the individual slowly acknowledges the impact of this loss and accompanying feelings.

2. Anger

- **This reaction usually occurs when an individual feels helpless and powerless.** Anger may result from feeling abandoned, occurring in cases of loss through death.
- **Feelings of resentment may occur toward one's higher power** or toward life in general for the injustice of this loss.
- **After an individual acknowledges anger, guilt may surface due to expressing these negative feelings.** Again, these feelings are natural and should be honored to resolve the grief.

3. Depression

- **After recognizing the true extent of the loss, some individuals may experience depressive symptoms.** Sleep and appetite disturbance, lack of energy and concentration, and crying spells are some typical symptoms.
- **Feelings of loneliness, emptiness, isolation, and self-pity can also surface during this phase,** contributing to this reactive depression.
- For many, **this phase must be experienced in order to begin reorganizing one's life.**

4. Bargaining

- At times, individuals may ruminate about what could have been done to prevent the loss.
- Individuals can become preoccupied about ways that things could have been better, imagining all the things that will never be.
- **This reaction can provide insight into the impact of the loss;** however, if not properly resolved, intense feelings of remorse or guilt may hinder the healing process.

5. Acceptance

- **Time allows the individual an opportunity** to resolve the range of feelings that surface.
- **The grieving process supports the individual.** That is, healing occurs when the loss becomes integrated into the individual's set of life experiences.
- **Individuals may return to some of the earlier feelings** throughout one's lifetime.
- There is no time limit to the grieving process. **Each individual should define one's own healing process.**

Factors That May Hinder The Healing Process

- 1) **Avoidance or minimization of one's emotions.**
- 2) **Use of alcohol or drugs to self-medicate.**
- 3) **Use of work (overfunction at workplace) to avoid feelings.**

Guidelines That May Help Resolve Grief

- 1) **Allow time to experience thoughts and feelings openly to self.**
- 2) **Acknowledge and accept all feelings, both positive and negative.** Use a journal to document the healing process.
- 3) **Confide in a trusted individual; tell the story of the loss.** Express feelings openly. Crying offers a release. Identify any unfinished business and try to come to a resolution.
- 4) **Bereavement groups provide an opportunity to share grief with others who have experienced similar loss.**
- 5) **If the healing process becomes too overwhelming, seek professional help.**

* RECOMMENDED READINGS

Death, The Final Stage of Growth. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975 Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth
 On Death and Dying. New York: MacMillan, 1969 Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth
 When Bad Things Happen to Good People. New York: Schocken Books, 1981 Kushner, H.S