What Is Grief?

Grief is a difficult emotion experienced by virtually everyone. It is an emotional reaction to a significant loss or expected loss. Grieving is a natural response to loss, and is an important part of the eventual recovery from loss. Grief can occur in response to many different types of loss, including:

- the death of a loved one
- the end or breakup of a significant relationship
- a loved one experiencing a chronic or terminal illness
- the loss of an important life factor, such as a well-liked job or financial security
- the death of a pet
- the experience of a significant negative change in physical functioning or health

Some of the signs & symptoms of the grieving process include:

- Denial, shock, and disbelief. Some may also experience temporary physical symptoms such as dizziness, nausea, confusion, difficulty sleeping, and loss of appetite.
- Anger and impatience, directed at many possible targets such as self, God, life in general, and specific people perceived to be involved with the loss.
- Guilt or remorse over the circumstances of the loss, and fear of the unpredictability of life.
- Depression and extreme sadness as reality gradually sets in. Symptoms may include withdrawal from friends and family, feelings of hopelessness, lack of energy, and physical symptoms.

- The need to talk about the loss. (Although some have a great deal of difficulty doing so.)

Something To Do About It...

Everyone grieves differently. While the process of grieving is normal, it can often be difficult and very painful. Many people find that talking about their grief, with people close to them, or working with a counselor or therapist, can help make the grieving process a little bit easier, reducing the duration and intensity of the emotions.

When Grief Lasts Too Long ... Or Is Too Intense:

Grief is typically viewed as a normal, though intense, form of sadness. However, grief can sometimes cause extreme or prolonged problems as the sadness evolves into serious disorders of anxiety and depression.
If this occurs, it is an indication that counseling or therapy is needed. These extreme reactions may include:

- feelings of panic and/or frenzy
- feeling overwhelmed and incapacitated by fear and grief
- emotional numbness that does not go away
- going to extremes to avoid thinking about the loss, such as abusing drugs or alcohol, or becoming totally immersed in work
- intense symptoms of depression which may include:
  - chronic insomnia, which may be interrupted by early morning waking after falling asleep and difficulty falling back asleep; lack of appetite or overeating; lack of appetite for life, such as relationships, sex, hobbies and recreation or other things you used to find enjoyable; obsessive thoughts of death or thoughts of suicide.

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