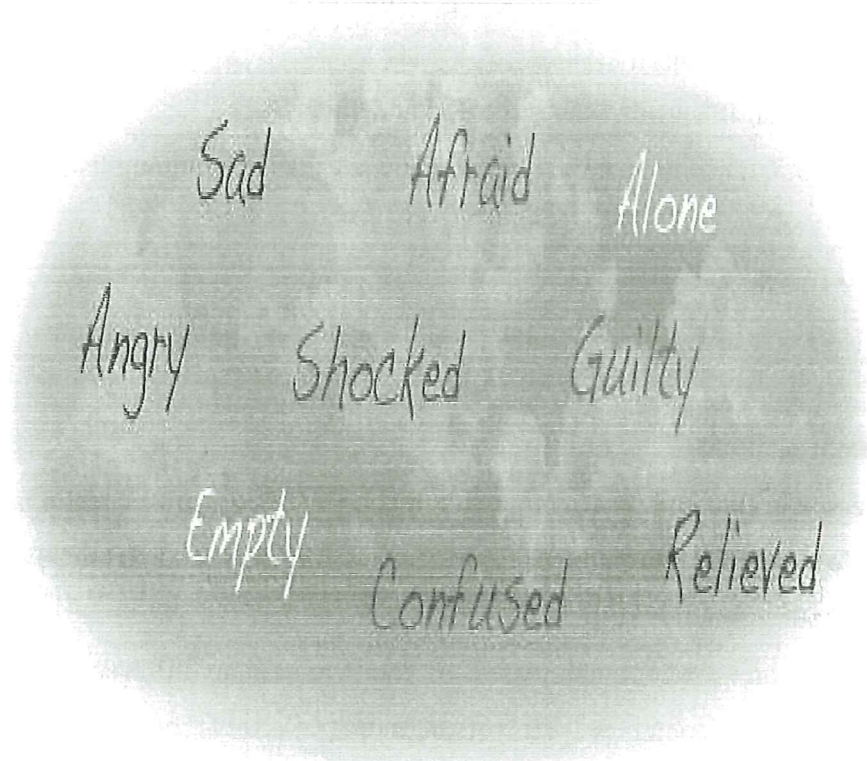


# MODULE 10

## Powerful Emotions: Grief, Loss, Shame & Guilt



# Grief & Loss

Grief occurs in response to the loss of someone or something. There can be many different kinds of loss such as the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, the loss of a relationship or the loss of one's health. Anyone can experience loss. The loss can be expected or it can be sudden. No matter how the loss occurs, grief is the normal and natural response, but each individual experiences loss differently and in a variety of ways. There are healthy ways to cope with grief and there are ways that delay the grieving process. It is important to acknowledge the grief which will ultimately help the healing process. Time and support are two important components that encourage healing.<sup>1</sup>

## What is Loss?

- Loss is physical. It can be felt as an aching in the heart, emptiness, a heavy weight that hampers each movement.
- Loss is emotional. It is grief, waves of tears and anger.
- Loss is mental. Your mind can be overtaken by self-defeating thoughts and a lack of direction<sup>2</sup>

## What is grief?

- Grief is emotional pain.
- It is expressed in three major ways – psychologically (through your feelings, thoughts and attitudes), socially (through your behaviour with others) and physically (through your health and bodily functions).
- Grief will have an impact on many areas of your life in many different ways.
- While you are experiencing the pain you are in the process of mourning.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, Fourth Edition. A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Paths of Change Men's Counselling Facilitator's Manual. An Intimate-Partner Abuse Prevention Program for Men

## **Five Stages of Grief**

People do not always experience all of the five “grief cycle” stages. Some people may revisit some of the stages, while some stages might not be experienced at all. Moving between stages can be more of a back and forth movement, rather than a progression. People’s grief and their reactions are a very individual experience.

People have to pass through their own individual journey of coming to terms with grief and loss. After that generally comes acceptance of reality and that allows that person to cope and move forward.<sup>3</sup>

### **Denial**

Not acknowledging that the loss has happened.

### **Anger**

Anger can show itself in different ways. People dealing with emotional upset can be angry with themselves, and/or with others, especially those close to them. Some people think about revenge as a way of coping during this stage, however, acting out makes the grieving process worse.<sup>4</sup>

### **Bargaining**

This stage involves fantasizing about the “what ifs” and “if only”. People facing loss and grief will often try to bargain or seek to negotiate a compromise. For example “Can we still be friends?” when facing a break-up. Bargaining rarely provides a workable solution, especially if it’s a matter of life or death.

### **Depression**

This stage means different things depending on whom it involves. It’s natural to feel sadness and regret, fear, uncertainty, etc. It shows that the person has at least begun to accept the reality.

### **Acceptance**

Again this stage definitely varies depending on a person’s situation, although generally it is a sign that there is some emotional separation and objectivity. Acceptance means I have emotionally experienced my loss(s) and worked through my pain, anger and depression.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Paths of Change Men’s Counselling Facilitator’s Manual. An Intimate-Partner Abuse Prevention Program for Men

## Common Symptoms of Grief

While loss affects people in different ways, many experience the following symptoms when they're grieving. Just remember that almost anything that you experience in the early stages of grief is normal.<sup>5</sup>

- Shock and disbelief – Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting him or her to show up, even though you know he or she is gone.
- Sadness – Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.
- Guilt – You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more you could have done.
- Anger – Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry with yourself, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you.
- Fear – A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own death, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.
- Physical symptoms – We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Grief: Normal, Complicated, Traumatic

## Guilt & Shame

Guilt is a feeling that everyone is familiar with. It is often described as a bothered conscience. We feel guilty when we feel responsible for an action that we regret. People can feel ashamed, unworthy, or embarrassed about actions for which they are responsible. When we talk about feeling guilty for something we did, this is called true guilt. People can also feel guilty about things that they are not responsible for. This false guilt can be equally damaging, if not more so. Feeling guilty for events which are out of our control is often unproductive and harmful.

Although shame is often related to guilt, it is important to understand the differences. Shame is a painful emotion that can result from a person's feeling of guilt. "We feel guilty for what we do. We feel shame for what we are."<sup>6</sup> Shame is often a much stronger and more intense emotion than guilt. Shame is when we feel disappointed about something inside of us.

### What is Guilt?

- Guilt is related to feeling bad because of something we have done or failed to do<sup>7</sup>.
- We feel badly for our behaviour or lack of behaviour.
- Guilt may motivate us to confess – cure is forgiveness.
- Guilt is associated with wrong-dong. We feel we owe a debt to another.
- With normal or healthy guilt, relief is experience when one feels that amends can be made

### What is Shame?

- We experience shame when we have failed to live up to our own or others' expectations of ourselves.
- We fear rejection and abandonment.
- There is a feeling that we are completely alone and totally unlovable.
- We may believe that we can only be accepted if we become more perfect and loveable.

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Shame and Guilt

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Paths of Change Men's Counselling Facilitator's Manual. An Intimate-Partner Abuse Prevention Program for Men

<b>Guilt</b>	<b>Shame</b>
Reality base emotion	Based on a system of perfection
Needed as a helpful, healthy guide for our behaviour	Only serves to weaken us and our relationships
Feel bad about behaviour that violates our morals/personal values	Sense of total failure as a person
Leads to accountability , respect for others and personal growth	Leads to isolation, discouragement and more shame
Exercises choices and options	Feel powerless, helpless and out of control
Once resolved, helps us feel better about ourselves	Begin to doubt ourselves completely
Negative and painful feelings about one's behavior	Negative and painful feelings about self
"I did something bad, but I am still a worthwhile person, I made a mistake"	"I am a bad and worthless person, I am a mistake" <sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Adapted from Paths of Change Men's Counselling Facilitator's Manual. An Intimate-Partner Abuse Prevention Program for Men

## Moving Beyond Shame and Guilt

- 1) Admit and accept the wrong. Anytime we make mistakes, no good will come unless we first admit that we have made a mistake, and then accept it. If we don't, then we are in a state of denial.
- 2) Learn from the mistake. Once we admit and accept that we have made a mistake, then we must ask the "Why?" question to discover our motivations.
- 3) Forgive yourself first. We cannot control whether another person will forgive us or not, but we can control whether we will forgive us or not. It is unhealthy not to forgive ourselves for making mistakes.
- 4) Change your behavior so you don't make the same mistake again. If we have come this far in resolving our guilt over some mistake we made, but don't change our ways, then of what value is it?
- 5) Lose the guilt and move forward with life. If we have accepted and admitted the mistake, then we are not in denial. Then, we determine why we made the mistake and learn from it. After that, we forgive ourselves first, because we have learned from our mistake and are now in a better place than we were.

*Even if you have made serious mistakes in life, carrying a burden of guilt will do no good if you have learned from the mistake.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Shame and Guilt

## Reflective Question

Funeral customs vary widely between families, cultures and religions. These customs or rituals help families cope and remember their loved ones. What rituals or customs would you practice?

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