

## **The Cycle Of Grief**

Grief is a very personal thing and people express their grief in different ways; but most psychologists and counsellors agree that there is a pattern which people go through, starting with shock and disbelief. This pattern has been called the "cycle of grief".

### **Shock**

People's first reaction is usually one of shock and complete disbelief. Shock affects people in different ways: everything can seem unreal; people can feel numb, withdrawn, detached; some people feel completely disorientated and don't know what to do with themselves. For some it is a nightmare they cannot escape. Many people quickly experience complex and confused feelings - anger, guilt, despair, emptiness, helplessness and hopelessness.

### **Denial**

When the shock begins to wear off, many people go through a stage of denial during which they cannot accept the reality of the loss. This often involves what counsellors call searching behaviour, an attempt at some level to try to deny that the death has occurred. People often find themselves thinking they have seen or heard the dead person. Many people talk aloud to the person they have lost.

### **Anger And Guilt**

It is common to experience anger, sometimes guilt and often both. Many people find themselves asking: "Why has this happened"? "Why me"? This is particularly so if the loss was sudden, unexpected or involved a tragic accident, Counsellors say that it is common to wish to find blame, either in ourselves, in others, or even with the person who has died, and this can lead to powerful feelings of anger and guilt.

### **Despair And Depression**

In the first few weeks the whole situation may seem unbearable and in the months that follow, many people feel there is little purpose in life and nothing of interest in the outside world. People sometimes begin to question their own sanity and think that you are going mad. Counsellors advise that this is a common experience.

### **Acceptance**

Eventually people pass through the period of depression and begin to accept the loss. This usually happens with the passage of time and, as the pain eases, we are able to think about our loved one and recall the past without feelings of devastation. This can take up to a year or longer.

It may be when people start thinking of beginning their life again, maybe renewing old interests and taking up new pursuits. Many people take up a hobby as a therapy. Some people feel that this is disloyal to the person who has died, but the past is always a part of us and is not affected by enjoying the present, or planning for the future.

When managing change it's important to recognise that transition is an individual reaction. The role of managers is to help others through to new beginnings whilst maintaining the level of activity or service. Here are some points to bear in mind when assessing where people are on the transition curve.

- Some people repeat sections of the curve to best handle transition (there's no right or wrong sequence).
- People will exhibit different emotions depending upon the nature and number of changes occurring to them at the same time and their 'emotional intelligence'. This is normal.
- Realising where you and the people around you are on the curve will help you initiate appropriate actions and respond effectively.
- Teams may travel the curve together but individuals will arrive at 'beginnings' at their own personal rate.
- It's OK to be slow so long as you're moving and not stuck somewhere.
- It's OK to be slow so long as you're planning on arriving sometime.
- It's OK to be fast so long as you're tolerant and supportive of slower travellers.
- It's OK to be fast so long as you honestly acknowledge your own 'endings'.