



HOW ARE YOU FEELING

A teen's guide to loss, grief and healing



This project was supported by grant No. 2003-DD-BX-1083
awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance,
Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points
of view or opinions in this document are those
of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the
U.S. Department of Justice.

HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

A teen's guide to loss, grief, and healing

If someone you love died in a drunk-driving crash, you may never again face anything as shocking as this loss. When someone kills another person in such a senseless and reckless way, those left behind may feel powerless, angry, and deeply sad. You are, without a doubt, going through something that is very painful and difficult to understand. Another person has taken a part of your future from you. Everything you are thinking and feeling is normal. In time, you will feel better, your life will continue, and you will be able to think of your loved one without it being so painful. You are not alone.

GRIEF

Grief is a word that is used to describe the thoughts and feelings people experience after a loss. Someone you love or feel very close to was killed in a destructive and violent act. When you first learned of the crash, you may have felt numb or as though you were in a dream. You may still feel this way. It is normal for your mind to protect you from feeling overwhelmed by thoughts and feelings that you are not ready to handle.

Although you may think no one can possibly understand how you are feeling, recognize that most everyone has experienced grief at some point in his or her life. As human beings, we all love. Because we

all love, we are affected when love is lost. Seek help and support from your family and friends. If your family and friends don't seem available to you, talk with your favorite teacher, a school counselor, or perhaps a youth pastor if you attend church.

Grief is a process, not an event. Understanding the grief process may help you begin to heal. No one grieves in the same way or for the same amount of time. Reading this booklet may help you see that what you are going through is normal. Many things affect how someone reacts to death.

THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Just after the crash, you might be thinking about your loved one constantly. You may see your loved one as you daydream, picturing him or her in the

Thoughts and Feelings: crash. Even though thinking about the crash may frighten or bother you, your mind continues to take you there. You may want to know exactly how your loved one died and whether he or she suffered. These thoughts may keep you up at night or cause nightmares. Your mind is trying to make sense out of something it cannot, and you may continue to think about it over and over again, hoping for some kind of answer.

Numbness
Disbelief
Anger
Guilt
Sadness

When a sudden death occurs, people tend to react with disbelief. They may deny that the event ever happened. It is difficult to understand that

someone you have loved, maybe even known your entire life, is now gone forever. This reality may confuse you, and you may have difficulty concentrating or organizing your thoughts. Finishing a simple task may take more time than it usually does. You may have a hard time paying attention in class or completing assignments. Eventually your new reality will become clear, and the confusion will disappear.

People who are grieving often feel angry. Angry with the person who was drinking and decided to drive. Angry with the police for not stopping the drunk driver or with the doctors for not saving a loved one's life. You may be mad at the person who died for getting into the car, or at yourself for somehow not preventing the crash. People often think irrational thoughts after a tragedy. The anger you feel may seem so intense you want revenge for your loved one.

Anger frequently becomes guilt over time. Guilt is feeling somehow responsible for what happened, or thinking that you didn't do enough in the relationship while your loved one was alive. You may say to yourself, "If only I had known," or "If only I told him I loved him." Guilt involves a lot of "should haves" or "should not haves." Regrets are normal, but you cannot change the past.

Deep sadness is another emotion that comes with the death of a loved one. This stems from feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and

hopelessness. You may feel as though you cannot go on without your loved one in your life, or as though you may never feel good again. It may be difficult for you to get out of bed in the morning or get motivated to go to school. You may not want to participate in your favorite activities.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Physical complaints, aches and illness are all common in people who are grieving. Doctors and medical researchers tell us that when people are under stress, they are more susceptible to disease. Your body's immune system is working overtime, and you may feel worn out. Headaches, dizziness, lightheadedness, and an upset stomach are also common. This is your body's reaction to the trauma you have experienced. You may have difficulty sleeping, or you may want to sleep all the time. You may feel nauseous and quit eating, or feel ravenous and eat everything in sight. Whatever you are feeling, you are not imagining things. During this early period of grief, eat well, get plenty of rest, and talk to someone about seeing your doctor if the problems persist.

“LOSING IT” AND DEPRESSION

It may seem you will never recover from the pain you feel. Some people describe feeling like they were “going crazy” or “losing it” during the grieving process. The first days, months, and maybe year following the traumatic death of a loved one are the most intense and most difficult. Shock, disbelief, anger, guilt, and sadness are all to be expected.

- *You may continue to feel helpless and hopeless long after the death, and you don't seem to be feeling any better at all.*

- *You may be unable to participate in activities of daily living such as getting up, getting dressed, and going to school.*

- *You may no longer participate in your favorite activities, nor do you want to do so.*

- *You may stop eating or sleeping for long periods.*

- *You may feel like you cannot go on living, and you may think about suicide or hurting yourself.*

However, you may really be struggling with this loss, and you may need extra support.

Some people who have experienced a traumatic loss become depressed and need professional help to heal. For some people, depression can be very intense but short-lived.

For others, depression can be less severe but last longer.

Thinking about death and dying after someone you love has died is normal, but if you are thinking about harming yourself as a result, tell someone right away. Depression is nothing to feel embarrassed about or ashamed of, and it is treatable.

HOW TO DEAL

If you recognize that you are grieving, you may be wondering how to cope. There is no magic cure for grief. However, there are things you can do that will help ease the pain and move you toward healing. This process involves expressing your thoughts and feelings, maybe again and again, in order to move through them.

Some people find sorrow too difficult and turn to alcohol or drugs to ease the pain. Unfortunately, there is no easy fix to make the loss easier to bear. Alcohol and drugs both are likely to make the situation more difficult to cope with, because both will contribute to irrational thoughts and depressed moods.

One of the easiest ways to express your thoughts and feelings is to talk about them. Talking to family, friends, teachers, counselors, or other people you trust can help ease the emotional pain. If you enjoy writing, try writing in a journal each day to release feelings, share thoughts about your loved one, and reflect on your hopes for the future. Other creative arts such as painting, drawing, and playing an instrument all provide a way to channel what is inside you.

If you don't enjoy creative arts and prefer to do something more active, continue to play your favorite sport, take frequent walks, or jog around your neighborhood. There are benefits to staying

active while you are grieving. Exercise releases endorphins- a group of substances formed within the body that naturally relieve pain. They enhance the immune system, they relieve pain, and they reduce stress. Meditation, deep breathing, and laughing can also produce endorphins.

HEALING

Some people think a person grieves a death and is “over it.” Grief is not wrapped in a neat little package. Some well-intentioned friends may encourage you to “move on.” Many people simply don’t feel comfortable talking about death or grief, or perhaps they don’t want to see you feeling badly anymore. It is okay to grieve in your own time and in your own way, despite what others want for you.

When you are able to acknowledge that the person you love is gone, you can begin to heal. You may still have feelings of loneliness, sadness, or anger, but you also continue to participate in the activities you once enjoyed. Getting involved in those normal activities and enjoying them doesn’t mean that you are forgetting about your loved one or that you no longer miss that person. Staying sad for long periods doesn’t measure the love you have for the person who died. All these thoughts and feelings, and many others, are associated with the grief process. Grieving is like a roller coaster ride. There are good days and bad days. With time and the love and support of others, you can work through your grief and move forward with your life.

NOTES
