

You Are Not Alone

Dealing With Grief after a Critical Incident

We can probably never be fully prepared to deal with violent or traumatic events. Each of us will handle an acutely stressful situation differently and we shouldn't compare ourselves with others.

We can be overwhelmed when dealing with a tragic loss or an event where our belongings or property have been destroyed. Or when there is a life threatening event, serious injury or a loss of life with our coworkers, friends or our family. In the aftermath of a tragic incident, those left behind must work through their grief. This is a process which often takes us through several stages:

Denial & Shock: We find the incident so difficult to accept that we may initially have only a sense of numbness and some confusion. A part of us seems to refuse to believe that such a thing has happened. In this stage we may even refuse to believe that we need the caring support of others and may be inclined to isolate ourselves.

Anger: At some point our numbness turns to anger. We may direct our anger at God, others or perhaps even ourselves. We may become irritable in the presence of others who care for us.

Bargaining & Guilt: We may begin to direct blame towards ourselves and others. We will have many thoughts beginning with 'if only'. We may feel guilty that we had not done more or perhaps blame ourselves for something we said or did. In either case, we fail to recognize that there were many factors leading up to the incident that we simply had no control over and perhaps many things we simply had no knowledge of.

Sadness & Depression: Once we begin to realize our loss, we may feel a heavy sadness and despair. In the depths of our grief we are quite tempted to think that no one cares. We find it difficult to imagine how joy can be restored. We fail, at this point, to recognize that our grief is a difficult season through which we must pass.

Recovery & New Hope: If we allow ourselves to work through our grief and reach out to those around us, we find that our dark night of the soul begins to fade. We stop blaming ourselves and/or others and begin to accept what cannot be changed. We choose not to be defeated by the adversity that came our way. We can't let it win. We know we must become better rather than bitter. If we allow this, we find new mission & purpose.

Some Suggestions for Working through Grief:

Stay connected to others: Find a caring person to share your thoughts and feelings with. Don't let yourself isolate.

Process your grief in segments: Just as it is unhealthy to deny your strong feelings of grief, it is also unhealthy to allow yourself to be totally consumed and shut down by them. Let yourself cry - it releases stress related toxins in our body. Pray if you are a person of faith. Take a walk and talk to a trusted friend. Journal or write letters to God & others. Maintain a balance of activities as much as you can. Work, recreation, rest, fellowship and humor are all needed to help us get through the healing journey. You need not feel guilty for having these distractions during your grief

Recognize that the stages are not always experienced in linear fashion: you may experience some shifting back and forth - that is not atypical. Seek professional help if needed. If you can't concentrate or function well for extended periods, when you're getting depressed, lethargic, feeling hopeless, or if you are having dark thoughts that your life doesn't matter or of harming yourself, seek help immediately.

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