

Jewish Care



Chessed Grief Loss & Bereavement Support Understanding your grief

The heart of grieving is the transition from loving in presence to loving in separation

Thomas Attig



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Life can change in an instant. Grief is a place that none of us knows until we reach it and experience the pain and emptiness that accompanies it. In bereavement, we experience death as a choiceless event that deprives us of the living, physical presence of another we hold dear. Through bereavement death brings the complex emotional reaction we call grief unbidden into our lives, another choiceless event. We cannot change death or our reaction to it; we can only respond through active, choiceful grieving.

Thomas Attig

HOW WE CAN HELP

JewishCare's Chessed – Grief, Loss and Bereavement Support Service – offers professional grief & loss counselling to those in the community who are grieving the death of a loved one and struggling with the many kinds of grief and loss that follow tumultuous life-changing events.

In addition, Chessed provides trained volunteers who help grieving individuals whose circle of support is limited.

WHY IS GRIEF COUNSELLING BENEFICIAL

When a person dies, a relationship does not die. When we experience death not as finality but as an invitation to a new relationship with our dying loved one, we are breaking from a modernist approach that dictates we must “get over” our grief and “move on” in life. In spite of what we are taught about how a bereaved person should behave and grieve, “letting go” may even be a harmful pathway.

Lorraine Hedtke

We understand that people grieve in many different ways, there being no right or wrong way to grieve

Each one of us grieves in our own unique way as we struggle with a range of feelings and thoughts. The intensity of these often conflicting emotions and thoughts can leave us feeling overwhelmed and unable to manage everyday life. Although family and friends are our greatest source of comfort, it is often helpful to talk to someone outside of your intimate circle: a caring person trained to help you understand, validate, explore and cope with your painful journey.



Counselling is a non-judgemental process that helps:

- identify, understand and express thoughts and feelings
- identify and understand the many unexpected losses that accompany the primary loss
- access our own resources, strengths and coping mechanisms
- adjust to life without the person who has died
- maintain a continuing bond with the person who has died

Although not all of the information in this booklet may be relevant to you and your loss, we hope that it may be useful for you both now and in the future

Grief is the reaction people have to any loss in their lives.

It includes a wide range of responses which vary with each person, the type of loss and its meaning to them, and their particular circumstances and experiences.

National Association for Loss and Grief





WHAT IS GRIEF

When you experience the death of someone close to you, feelings of loss may occur on a number of different levels. These include: loss of companionship, loss of the future, your sense of security, your sense of self, your hopes and dreams. It is not unusual to feel vulnerable, experience a loss of confidence and a lessening of self-esteem.

Grief can be overwhelming and may affect many aspects of our lives. Our physical and emotional wellbeing is impacted, and our family, social and work relationships often change.

As loss, and the grief that follows, often rocks the very foundations upon which we build our lives, we can become riddled by painful thoughts and feelings. Meaning and purpose are wounded, often leading us to question our life's direction and our spiritual beliefs.

At moments of deep transition, these feelings are perfectly natural

Some people may try to tell you what you should or shouldn't be doing in your grieving. However we all experience grief in unique and personal ways and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Furthermore there is no typical timeframe in which your grief should be 'over' and often things start to feel worse before they feel better.

Grief is a roller-coaster

There are no stages to grieving, and the painful thoughts and feelings you believed you had worked through may reappear from time to time. Only *you* know exactly how you feel and what you need.

During the course of your life there will be many milestones, such as birthdays and anniversaries, as well as a myriad of everyday things like social events, films, music, food, sounds, smell etc. that will remind you of your loss and then trigger feelings of sadness: *I was alright until last week when they showed our favourite TV...*

On the one hand these moments are painful, but on the other hand these memories help us to honour our loved ones in their absence, keep them in our lives, and validate the relationships that helped make us who we are.



THE BODY/MIND'S RESPONSE TO GRIEF

Physical responses you may experience while grieving include:

- loss of appetite
- gastro-intestinal upsets
- dry mouth
- insomnia/hypersomnia
- fatigue and lethargy
- loss of sexual drive

Thoughts and feelings you may experience include:

- sadness: *We'll never get to retire like we planned*
- despair: *There's nothing to look forward to*
- abandonment: *She wasn't just my wife, she was my best friend*
- hopelessness: *I don't know how to go on living without them*
- anger: *It's not fair...he was such a good person*
- loneliness: *The night times are the worst...the house is so empty*
- guilt: *If only I had done more...valued her more..*
- irritability
- difficulty in concentrating
- trouble thinking and making decisions
- confusion
- forgetfulness
- lower tolerance towards family and friends
- meaninglessness: *Everything seems so trivial*
- feeling that no one understands what you are going through
- feeling the need to continue to have a relationship with the person who died:
I still talk to him when I am on my own...



Not everyone will experience all of these reactions. You may experience some and not others and at times you may experience an emotion or physical reaction more intensely than at others.

LOOKING AFTER MY HEALTH

What can I do to care for myself?

Allow yourself to grieve in your own way and in your own time.

Try not to isolate yourself. Accept help and support from others and tell family and friends what you need and how they can help you.

Take time for yourself to do things that you enjoy or will help you express your grief. Write a journal, express yourself through art, music.

Recognise that your grief will be unique. Don't let anyone tell you what you should be doing. Listen to yourself.

Give yourself permission to grieve. Experience and reflect on your emotions as they arise. It is OK to cry, feel angry or relieved.

You may want to talk to someone. If this is the case it is important to identify family, friends or a counsellor with whom you can speak freely. It needs to be someone you can trust to listen and not judge you.

Don't let anyone minimise your loss. Your understanding of what has been lost is what matters.

Be aware of advice givers. Only adopt advice if it is right for you.

Just try to get through one day at a time.

Initially, think small in terms of progress and goals. It may be hard to see progress on a day to day basis, so evaluate your progress over time.

If possible, avoid making major life changes or decisions for a while. For example changing jobs or moving house.



Expect to have less energy. Allow yourself to slow down and let go of some responsibilities for a time.

Take time out to pamper yourself. Have a massage, go for a walk, read a book, listen to music, etc.

Try not to neglect your physical wellbeing. Do some gentle exercise, get plenty of rest and eat regularly.

Avoid overuse of drugs and alcohol as a temptation to ease your pain. This will not take away the grief you are feeling, it may only postpone it.

Take care whilst driving – poor concentration can make it hazardous.

Tell yourself everyday that your pain and heartache will ease, even though right now it might seem impossible.

THE JOURNEY OF GRIEF

Grief is like the weather, you don't know how it will be on any one day. Some days may seem so overwhelming with sadness and distress, that you wonder how long this is going to last and if it will ever end. The pain never goes away completely, but it seems that slowly time begins to lengthen the space between the pain and the feelings lessen in intensity.

A bereaved client

The following are some of the things you may experience as you learn to live in a world that has changed forever. However, as grief is a very individual and unique experience. You may relate to some and not to others.

Your initial reaction may be one of shock, numbness and disbelief, even if you felt you were prepared for their death. Then as the days pass, you will experience many difficult moments as the realisation sets in that your loved one will not return.

Your grief utilises more energy than you can imagine. You may notice that you feel more drained and fatigued. Simple things require more effort. Listen to your body and pace yourself.



Often family and friends avoid talking about the person who has died in an attempt 'not to upset you'. If you want people to talk about the dead loved one, let them know you want to talk about them. Talking is therapeutic.

The greatest gift you can give anyone is your undivided attention.

Will Schalbe

It is not uncommon to start feeling worse 4–6 weeks after the death of your loved one, especially as you resume your life's routine, and as those who have rallied around you no longer visit or call as frequently.

During the months following the death, you may have good days when you feel you are coping well, and bad days when you experience "waves" of grief without warning. Slowly, time begins to lengthen the intervals between bouts of pain, and the painful feelings lessen in intensity. Memories surrounding your bereavement become less intense, allowing the pleasant memories of your loved one to come to the fore.

Grief is not about moving on and letting go of the person who died. It is about remembering the person in whichever way feels right for you. Loss is often touted as something you can 'get over' after a suitable period of time, and well intentioned family and friends may offer advice as to what you should be doing.

Comments such 'it's time to move on' or 'get on with your life' are not uncommon. Adopt suggestions that feel right for you and go at your own pace. It takes time to adjust to life without the person whose absence you are grieving.

As each and every one of us grieves and shows their grief in different ways, it may appear that family and friends are not sad or missing the person who died. Just as you expect your way of grieving to be respected by others, so too find it in your heart to respect their unique ways of grieving.

When you reach milestones such as the anniversary of your loved one's death, important anniversaries you shared, family events like births and marriages – moments when your loved one would have been present – the pain of their absence may be very strong. Planning ahead and including rituals to incorporate



the memory of your absent loved one, may help you get through these tough times.

When we think of those who have died in our lives, we notice how an on-going relationship with them in memory takes place alongside our other relationships. Their legacy in memory consists of their lifetimes, remembered moments, episodes, periods, and stories, none of which is cancelled by death.... [We] can make meaning through deepening these memories and allowing them to permeate the fabric of our daily lives and the next chapter of our life narrative.

Robert Neimeyer

Death often leads to a reassessment of how you see life: searching for new meaning and questioning old ideas is normal. The many changes you experience can cause you to feel confused about your identity. Even feelings from the past you thought were long resolved may resurface.

Your spiritual beliefs may be a support to you or you may feel distanced from them. Cultural and religious rituals may or may not be helpful at this time.

Many people find rituals, be they traditional or specially created, helpful in dealing with loss and grief. For example: you may like to write your loved a letter from time to time bringing them up to date with the events of your life. This often provides the dual purpose of including the dead person in your life and helping to process the significance and emotional impact of these events.

There can be good days and bad days. It is important to laugh and enjoy things again. This does not mean that you are not sad or missing the person who has died, rather it is an affirmation of your life, something your loved one would want for you.

Bereavement undermines what we have learned about how to be and act in the world. It makes it impossible for us to actively engage in the world just as we had before the death. Grieving in response is a process of relearning the world, of reengaging in the world in some old and familiar ways that still work for us and in some inevitably new and unprecedented ways, given that death has changed the world significantly.

Thomas Attig



GRIEF – THE JEWISH PERSPECTIVE & PROCESS

Grieving cannot be ordered or categorized, hurried or controlled, pushed away or ignored.

Mourning is not grief but rather the way out of grief. Jewish tradition has moulded many mourning procedures specifically to suit human sensitivities so that we can slowly and successfully adapt to a universe that is permanently changed.

Rabbi Maurice Lamm

The Jewish process of mourning, Aninut, Shiva and Shloshim, provides a structure for expressing the pain of loss, honouring the deceased, and reaffirming our own lives through connection to family, friends and the community at large. The different stages of mourning allow us to come to grips with the loss.

Time heals. Not because we are busy and our memories fade, but because the passage of time allows for reflection, a reaffirmation of life and an understanding that our loved ones live on in us: for many elements of our character, actions and values stem from the relationships we built together.

The body dies, but, as the essences of our loved ones are eternal, the connections between us live on. Understanding this allows the vacuum to slowly fill, but not completely, as there will always be an empty space inside.

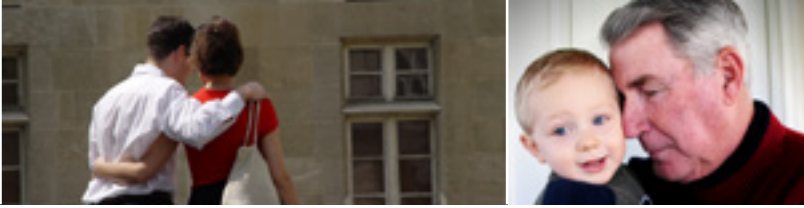
The laws and rituals of mourning are intended to help mourners focus on their own spirituality, and living through the three phases of bereavement and grief helps guide mourners to gradually find their way back into the world:

Aninut – Bereavement after death – before burial

Shiva – The seven days after the funeral

Shloshim – Thirty days after the death

Shana – A year's mourning for children grieving the loss of a parent



SHIVA

Shiva means seven, and is the name given to the period of strict mourning which the immediate family observes at home. Shiva starts on the day of the burial. It is preferable that Shiva be held in the house where the deceased lived and died as the loved one's physical presence is still palpable and 'their spirit continues to dwell'. The week allows the mourners to bond in grief, share memories and provides a space for personal reflection. Furthermore, the Shiva is a time for others to visit, pay their respects and offer comfort.

Some of the outward signs of mourning which symbolise the disregard for vanity and physical comfort include:

- Mourners sit without shoes on their feet
- Mourners sit on low stools or cushions
- Mirrors are covered – moving our attention from the external to the internal
- Baths and showers are taken for hygienic not comfort purposes
- Personal grooming (makeup, hairstyling) is forgone
- No work is undertaken

SHLOSHIM

The week of Shiva is followed by a month of less intense ritual mourning.

Shloshim means thirty and is counted from the date of the funeral and includes the Shiva week. It is customary to hold a gathering at the end of the Shloshim to conclude the official mourning period for a spouse, children, siblings, but not for a parent.



THE ONE YEAR PERIOD

The one year restricted period is observed when mourning a parent.

This is based on the belief that our primary relationships with our parents define who we are. Hence the loss of this relationship has deep spiritual and psychological ramifications which necessitate a longer period of adjustment. In mourning our parents for a year we show the deepest respect for those who gave us life.

YAHRTZEIT

There are different customs to mark the anniversary of the death.

Traditionally one lights a Yahrzeit candle at home the night before the anniversary of a loved one's death. It is also customary to give Tzedakah (charity) in memory of the person who has died. The belief is that this helps elevate the person's soul.

UNVEILING OF THE TOMBSTONE

The custom is to erect the tombstone at some time within the year after death. The belief is that this is a way of giving honour to the body that housed the soul.

There is usually a small ceremony for the unveiling of the stone.

Family and friends are invited to the graveside where the mourners unveil the stone that is covered by a cloth.

Psalms are recited.

Thoughts and memories of the deceased are shared.

When people are in a state of grief, they physically feel a vacuum within them. This is the most painful state, because the essential drive of every person is the drive for fullness and completion.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch



YIZKOR

Yizkor means a time to remember. A special prayer is said on behalf of family members who have died. This memorial prayer is recited in the synagogue on significant holidays including:

- Yom Kippur
- The last day of Pesach
- The last day of Shavout
- The second last day of Sukkot (Shmini Atzeret)

Some people find it helpful to visit the grave and place stones on the grave. Tzur (stone) represents the eternal devotion to upholding the memory of the person who has died, like the cornerstone of a building, placed to last for all time.





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JEWISHCARE

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You can follow us on:



The flame of a candle is the symbol of JewishCare's Chessed Bereavement Service.

In Judaism the soul is often compared to the flame of a candle.

Each person brings light into the world and just as one can take from a flame to light more candles without diminishing the original flame, so too can a person give of themselves without ever being diminished.

People who have died and have touched our lives, their light goes on forever – as we the living, keep their flame alive.



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