Managing Depression While Experiencing a Loss

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Depression After Loss

Loss and depression have a strong association. It seems the more loss you experience, the greater your depression and the greater your depression, the more loss you have. Each loss is compounded on the one that came before it, so it is crucial to process and resolve loss. If you do not, each loss becomes more difficult to handle and more detrimental to your mental health.

Denial, anger, depression, bargaining and acceptance. You have probably heard about these stages of loss and grief. But despite its popularity, this model was actually designed to describe the experience of dying rather than living through the loss of someone or something.

Experiencing Grief

If you have experienced a loss recently, whether it was a loved one, a job, a relationship, or something else, consider a different model to guide you through the process. Below is the outline of a model that was designed for the experience of grief.

- Acknowledge the loss. In the moments and days following a loss, there is a great deal for your mind and your body to go through, including shock, denial, panic, anger and guilt. If you are prone to depression, expect these symptoms to climb as feelings of loneliness and despair begin. This phase of the process is mostly passive as the symptoms take course. One of the best things to do during this stage is to retell the story; share your history with your loved one or the story of their death.
- Experience the pain. For most people, this second stage takes the longest. During this stage you will feel helpless, frustrated and possibly resent and bitterness. You may experience disorientation and a fear of losing control during this time. Depression after loss is to be expected, and sending yourself positive messages like “What I’m feeling is normal” or “This is all part of the process” serves as a reminder that your pain is natural and productive.

- Re-adjusting to the loss. This stage is a turning point as it is marked by adaptation to life without your loved one. There will be missing and yearning to see or hear from them once again. Throughout this stage you will find new roles and responsibilities. Making the conscious choice to adapt will help you move on during this period.
- Re-investing emotional energy. For so long you have been using your energy to feel sad, angry and guilty. This phase involves using that energy in new, productive ways. You will feel hope and growth as this period provides a sense of healing and movement forward. You will have new relationships, activities and new situations to enjoy.
- Reconciling the loss. The goal of grief and loss is not to forget your loved one or the loss itself. Rather, the goal is to find the ability to remember the loss with less pain attached. This is finding acceptance and seeing that new opportunities still exist following the loss. Reconciling means finding new directions.

Conclusion

The experience of grief and loss is not to be taken lightly. It is a serious process that takes time. Though the above can serve as a guide, it is up to you to grieve and mourn the way you need to. Avoid becoming stuck in depression or anger by seeking feedback from trusted supports or a therapist. With patience and hard work, you can find the acceptance you have been seeking.