

Grade 7 March 1

Living through loss

We all suffer loss at one time or another. Perhaps it's the loss of a bit of self-respect through unthinking acts or words. Or maybe it was the loss of a pet or a loved one through death. Or it could be the loss of the family unit through divorce. When loss happens, we typically go through five stages of grief.

1. Denial

"This really can't be happening." The loved one can't be dead; it's too soon. Your parents are not breaking up; they're just angry and need time to work things out.

2. Bargaining

"If this can just go away this time, I promise I'll never do it again." "Oh, please let me have time to say a proper good-bye! I'll never forget again." "Please, get back together again. I'll do anything you want!"

3. Anger

"It's Jane's fault! She's always making me do things I don't want to do." "Why didn't you take more care? Why'd you have to die?" "Don't you realize what you're doing to our family? Don't you care for anyone other than yourselves?"

4. Depression

"What are people going to say? What if Mom or Dad finds out?" "Where has Grandpa gone? Did it hurt him to die?" "What will happen to me if Mom and Dad don't get back together again?" "Why doesn't anyone care?" It's gone! You've lost a piece of yourself. No one seems to understand. You're depressed.

5. Acceptance

Finally, you accept that it is over. Nothing can be done. Nothing can bring back the past. But you have the ability to go on in a positive light. *"It's over, but I still have memories of the good times. No one can take these from me!"*

Denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance, almost everyone goes through these five stages when they lose something. It's natural.

Affects entire family

Any loss affects the family. But a breakup or a death is probably the most traumatic.

For young people going through all the physical and emotional changes of puberty, it can be particularly so. Most often, they are the most vulnerable.

They may view death as a mysterious and fearful thing. Divorce may seem both an embarrassment and the end of their world. Most pass naturally and quickly through these various stages of emotion from denial to acceptance. Some, however, bottle their emotions up, denying that the loss really affects them. Others can become so upset that they cease to function properly.

Helping the healing

Parents can help by being especially conscious of the stage of grief the young person is in. They help with the understanding that all loss hurts. They acknowledge that to wish things could be different is only natural. They help their children keep the good memories in view.

Have a sympathetic ear. Let the young person talk. Too often, we feel that we need to say the right thing. Yet, at times like these, no words are totally adequate. What is adequate is a caring listener, one who truly tries to understand what is being felt and being lived.

We cannot stop the hurt from happening. But we can come to understand and accept our loss. In this way we can go on, somewhat stronger and better prepared than before.

"The most precious thing a parent can give a child is a lifetime of happy memories."--Frank Tyger