

Carers' Self Advocacy Toolkit

About loss



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Looking after someone may be a large part of your life, but it is inevitable that your caring role will change over time.

You may be at the point of giving up your job and/or home to be with the person you are caring for and you are experiencing difficult emotions around a loss of your independence. Or it may no longer be possible to look after the person at home. There may come a time when you have to think about your life when your caring role has come to an end.

Loss is all about unwanted change, a coming to terms with the circumstances in your life outside our control. Loss is not limited to being bereaved.

A huge range of emotions, physical reactions and thoughts can be felt in response to a loss and it can also significantly affect your behaviour and relationships with others.

Below are the five stages of loss, although they are by no means 'rules' on what does or should happen to a person who experiences loss. Everyone is different. Experiencing grief for someone or something is normal and it can last longer than you think it is going to, and be more painful than you expect.

Denial and Isolation

The first reaction to learning of a loss or future loss is to deny the reality of the situation. It is a normal reaction to rationalise overwhelming emotions. It is a defence mechanism that buffers the immediate shock. Words are blocked out and facts are put out of sight. This is a temporary response that carries you through the first wave of pain.

Anger

As the masking effects of denial and isolation begin to wear, reality and its pain re-emerge. You are not ready. The intense emotion is deflected from your

vulnerable core, redirected and expressed instead as anger. The anger may be aimed at inanimate objects, complete strangers, friends or family. Anger may be directed at someone who is involved in your loss. Rationally, you know it is not their fault. Emotionally, however, you may resent the person for causing you pain. You may feel guilty for being angry, and this makes you more angry.

Bargaining

The normal reaction to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability is often a need to regain control—

- If only I had done something about it sooner
- If only I had asked for help earlier
- If only I had done something different

You may ask a higher power to change the situation as a line of defence to protect yourself from the painful reality.

Depression

Two types of depression are associated with loss. The first one is a reaction to practical implications relating to the loss. What do I need to arrange and sort out? You may worry that you are neglecting those who still need your support. You may need a bit of helpful cooperation and a few kind words. The second type of depression is more subtle and,

in a sense, perhaps more private. It is your quiet preparation to separate and to bid your loved one farewell.

Acceptance

Not everyone arrives at acceptance of a loss they have suffered. A loss that is sudden and unexpected may mean you are angry and in denial for a long time. This phase is marked by withdrawal and a sense of calm. This is not a period of happiness and is not the same as depression. Coping with loss is ultimately a deeply personal and singular experience — nobody can help you go through it more easily or understand all the emotions that you're going through. But others can be there for you and help comfort you through this process. The best thing you can do is to allow yourself to feel the grief as it comes over you. Resisting it only will prolong the natural process of healing.

Things that might be able to help

Naming the loss

By breaking down the overwhelming sense of loss into the many smaller losses you have sustained, the impact of the loss may be easier to understand, which can help you pinpoint how you may want to begin building an alternative life for yourself.

Being in your body

We are taught from a young age to live our lives from our minds, as if this was all there was to us, which can lead to lots of stress and fear. By 'living in our bodies' this means reconnecting with those parts of you that bring you into the present moment, which can help combat feelings of anger about the past or fear about the future. **See the satellite on mindfulness for more.**

Self-compassion

Self-compassion and self-care are also very important if you are in a state of loss as it can help you reconnect to a sense of meaning. Meditation, guided imagery, mindfulness art or music therapy or keeping a journal about your daily thoughts and

feelings could also help you when you are experiencing loss.

Counselling opportunities

Ask your GP to be referred to a counsellor or look at the website for the British Association for Counsellors and Psychotherapists www.bacp.co.uk for a list of practitioners in your area. Also see the Cruse website that specialises in bereavement counselling. <http://www.cruse.org.uk/>

References

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