

Student Services **LEARNING COMMONS**

Counselling Services

Coping with Loss

Loss can take many forms. Some are obvious losses like the death of a loved one, a break-up, or loss of a job. Others like moving, success (loss of striving), illness (loss of health), dropping out or graduating from school may not be so obvious but bring on the same feelings. They can be emotional wounds that lead us to feel helpless, fearful, guilty, pessimistic, or angry. We might have trouble concentrating, low energy or motivation, trouble sleeping or loss of appetite. Any or all of these reactions to loss are normal and expected during and after a loss. It is part of the body's natural healing process.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross organized the reactions to loss, and grief into stages: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Stages may overlap or not occur at all, but generally we all move through a process of healing regardless of the kind of loss we have experienced. Only the intensity of feeling and the duration of recovery will differ.

Here are some suggestions that will help you Survive, Heal, and even Grow.

In the beginning there is,

Survival

Know that you will get better. If you need it, get help at once.

Acknowledge the loss. Know that you are not alone.

It's ok to feel. Be with the pain – see it as healing not hurting.

Give yourself time to heal. Healing has progressions and regressions, ups and downs.

Breathe; rest, but stick to a schedule. Don't become lethargic.

Keep decision making to a minimum.

It's ok to go through the motions in slow motion.

Seek comfort from friends, family, co-workers.

Find others who have survived a loss. Join groups. Read books.

The question of suicide – keep it a question, it's not really an answer. Seek professional help if you want to act on these thoughts.

In time there is,

Healing

Mourn and do it now.

Earlier losses may surface and you may be healing them too.

Be gentle with yourself. Forgive imperfections. Don't take on too much challenge or stress.

Healing is a process. Do it at your own pace. Be patient with those who may feel you should be better by now.

Don't make "things" more important than your healing. If pictures or mementos get in the way, put them away or get rid of them.

Whatever you focus on becomes more powerful. Focus on a positive outcome. Expect to be better and it will happen. Visualize how that will look.

Accept fear as a friend. Use it to help you face challenges and move ahead.

Depression, sadness is ok. Crying can help.

Anger is ok as long as it's not against yourself or others. Channel it safely.

Guilt and regret are natural. Excessive self-punishment is not. Try forgiveness.

Try professional services (exercise trainer, nutritionist), counsellors, psychologists.

Monitor your health. See your doctor. Losses can trigger some illnesses.

Pamper yourself.

Being upset longer is not an indication that you really loved someone, nor is healing quickly a sign that you didn't.

Try keeping a journal. Write when you feel like it. It helps some people, but not all.

Laugh.

In the end there can be,

Growth

You are stronger for the experience. Let go of the loss and move on.

Forgive – the other person and yourself. Untie yourself from the past and be free.

Look for the good. You are a better person for having loved.

Start experimenting with new behaviours and activities.

Be open to new things – people, places. Decorate, buy new clothes, make new goals.

Words have power. Beware of shoulds, musts, never, wish, hope.

Life is not perfect. It includes *both* good *and* bad.

You're in control of your choices and how to shape your life.

The anecdote for anxiety is action. Worried about something? Do something about it.

Memories and anniversaries bring an experience of the loss. Expect this as part of healing and growing.

Appreciate solitude, creativity – enjoy it. Appreciate your growth.

Do something for someone else.

Remember, happiness is dependent upon your *attitude* toward what happens to you, not on *what* happens to you.