

TCF Seminar Workshop: Saturday Morning, 18/6/2011

Life after Loss: Grief and Depression: What is the difference?

Observations of a family GP:

- Introduction
- What is grief?

Grief is a natural response to a significant loss of a child/loved one.

Grief includes the psychological, behavioral, social and physical reaction to the loss of someone or something that is closely tied to the person's identity, like a child.

- What happens when a child/loved one dies?

There will be acute separation pain through the distress panic/grief primary function reaction. It really hurts the feelings of the bereaved person or persons.

- Why does it hurt so much?

Because it is such a primary function to look after your children, the separation/panic pain is a deep seated real pain.

- What can you do at the time?

Mostly there are things that need to be done, a funeral/cremation service to honor the deceased person/child. It is good to make it a celebration of a life and emphasize the happy moments.

- Stages of grief?

Denial, you cannot believe it happened.

Anger/Guilt, why did this happen? Could I have done anything to prevent it?

Bargaining, please make this not be true.

Depression, I am too sad to do anything.

Acceptance, I am finally at peace with what happened.

Grief is a journey, different for each individual person. You cannot force or hurry it.

Healing happens only gradually. There is no normal time table for grieving.

- Looking back at the life and remembrance of the deceased.

Do something special, make a photo book, have a photograph in a special place.

- What is depression?

Depression is a mood disorder in which feelings of sadness, loss, anger or frustration interfere with every day life for an extended period of time, not necessarily due to any particular event.

Symptoms of depression are:

1. Persistent sadness, anxiety or empty mood.
2. Sleeping too much or the opposite with insomnia, middle of the night or early waking.
3. Reduced appetite or overeating and weight gain
4. Loss of interest or pleasure in activities.
5. Difficulty thinking, concentrating, remembering or making decisions.
6. Fatigue or loss of energy.
7. Thoughts of death or suicide.
8. Feeling inappropriate guilt, hopelessness or worthlessness.

- What is the difference between grief and depression?

Grief happens due to a loss and is a “natural” response to that loss. Depression happens due to a clinical condition, often caused by prolonged anxiety causing exhaustion of the brain’s energy.

- Support and understanding.

If you have a good support/family network it will help to be carried by the compassion of other people. Often the best support is to have a person to talk to who can listen and has the patience and courage to be there for you.

- Grief counseling, who is best at it?

Often the first people to give support are the social workers in the hospital. You need time to say good bye. The next person are the undertakers, who deal with this sort of situation. The minister of religion or any group one belongs to. GP’s used to do this but it is getting further away from the city GP’s.

- Cultural differences.

Southern Europeans, Greek, Italian people. Aborigines: Often looking for the “cause” of the death. Ceremonies, church services.

- Social influences.
- Gender differences.
- Medication: When is it appropriate and when is it necessary?

Antidepressants, sleeping tablets, calmatives?

- Complementary medicine: Self medication, what works?

Omega-3, DHA, St.Johns Wort.

- Lifestyle changes: Exercise, Tai Chi, reflective walking.

An organization such as TCF to have a forum to feel you are in amongst people who have the same experience. I felt the candle light service last year was very good and something very special.