

Grief Recovery Pyramid

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www.arlenetaylor.org

Loss, according to Webster's Dictionary, is the experiencing of losing something. It could be the loss of a loved one in death or divorce; displacement due to a natural disaster such as an earthquake; a mastectomy or the amputation of a limb; the loss of some sensory perception (e.g., sight or hearing); a hoped-for event that does not materialize or the diminishment of perceived options (e.g., inability to follow a certain career path), or the loss of specific types of freedoms. Defining loss more globally can help point out the need for effective grief recovery. Unfortunately, many human beings are unprepared to deal with loss effectively. Here are some contributors:

1. Culture has taught its members how to be adept at *acquiring* but not at *losing*
2. People have learned unhelpful ways of coping with loss and the resulting emotion of sadness, or didn't develop the skills required to deal effectively with the stress that accompanies loss
3. Many are uncomfortable about knowing what to say in situations of loss and sadness
4. Present society emphasizes *instant everything*, which can increase one's impatience with the fact that grief recovery takes time
5. Many have not yet learned how to identify and manage emotions accurately or manage feelings effectively
6. Society has perpetuated many myths related to grief and loss, including:
 - Grieve alone, avoid upsetting others
 - Let sleeping dogs lie
 - Replace the loss as soon as possible
 - You must cry in order to grieve
 - Don't cry!
 - Just get over it!
 - Give it time and the pain will resolve on its own
 - Don't trust in the future, there is only now
 - Recall only the good times to avoid disloyalty
 - Don't feel sad, you'll just get depressed
 - Be a good example to others
 - Stay strong!

In general, behavioral patterns related to loss and grief are learned, often in one's family-of-origin. These patterns reflect role modeling of caregivers, personal experience, cultural conditioning, verbal and nonverbal instructions (e.g., religion, politics), and expectations, to name just a few. Learning more effective behaviors can increase one's likelihood of recovering successfully from loss and freeing up vital energy. Becoming empowered to deal more effectively with one's own losses increasing the possibility of being better equipped to offer encouragement and affirmation to others during their episodes of loss and grief recovery.

Grief and Grief Recovery

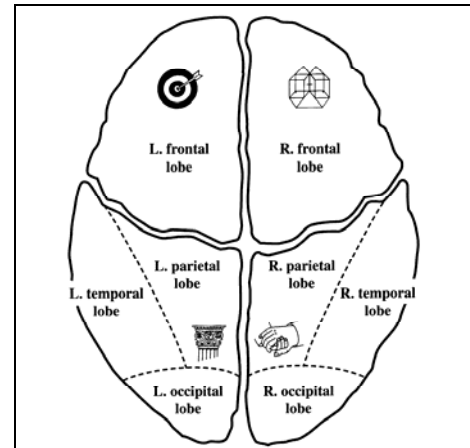
Grief is a natural response to loss. It can be defined simply as intense emotional suffering related to misfortune, injury, or evil of any type. It can also be described as conflicting feelings that are experienced following any major change to a familiar state of affairs. Unresolved loss or unhealed grief can accumulate and can impact the intensity of one's reaction to a present experience of loss.

Grief recovery is the process of learning to *feel better* and to achieve a condition of balance following any type of loss. For some, grief recovery means returning to a previously experienced state of soundness and balance; for others, it means attaining a state of soundness and balance that they may not have experienced before. It involves grieving the loss and healing the emotional pain. Just as human beings can recover from the pain of surgery and feel better as the incision heals, or recover from a broken bone and feel better as the bone knits together, so you can recover from a loss and feel better as you move through the grieving process and heal from the emotional pain.

Your Unique Brain





Loss hurts. There’s no way around that. Your emotions and feelings are closely intertwined with both loss and with the grieving process. Because of this, your grieving style is impacted by the way in which your brain manages and expresses emotions. This, in turn, is influenced by your own innate thinking process preference.

The cerebrum is divided by natural fissures into two hemispheres. Additional natural fissures in each hemisphere create four divisions. Each human brain is believed to possess a biochemical advantage in one of the four divisions (e.g., PET Scan studies). This means that you tend to expend the least amount of energy when performing tasks that draw on the functions of your most efficient division.



You tend to expend more energy (e.g., require more oxygen, glucose, micronutrition, rest/sleep) when performing tasks that draw on functions in non-preferred divisions (and that’s after skills are developed). It also means that unless you make a different conscious choice your brain tends to gravitate toward tasks and behaviors that utilize your most energy-efficient division. This advantage is often referred to as your brain lead and it can impact grief perception, expression, and recovery processes.

Stereotypical Approach to Emotion based on Thinking Process Preference

<p>Left Frontal Lobe </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oblivious to emotion in self and in others (may lack access in the BR), and doesn’t read nonverbals • Perceives emotion as a potential loss of control • May use a substance (e.g., alcohol) to get in touch with emotions and feelings • Emotion of joy may be processed in the FL so may be more aware of it than other emotions • May express emotion through criticism, biting wit, sarcasm, and blowing up 	<p>Right Frontal Lobe </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceives emotion in the self (not necessarily in others) • Doesn’t read nonverbals • Likes change so is less threatened by emotions • Protective emotions may be processed in the FR mode (e.g., anger, fear, sadness) so may be more aware of those emotions • May express emotion through gestures (e.g., tears, large motor movements, whole body position, prosody, humor, drama, stories)
<p>Left Posterior Lobes </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tries to avoid emotions • Doesn’t read nonverbals • Perceives emotions as potentially disruptive to the status quo • May maintain an emotion out of habit or the emotion most often experienced • Expresses emotion habitually and minimally 	<p>Right Posterior Lobes </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceives emotion in the self and in others • Sensitive to emotions in nature • Empathetic, reads nonverbal body language • Often mirrors emotions back to others • Expresses emotion through affective speech, tonality, drama, stories, nonverbals (e.g., touch, body position, small motor gestures)

Grief Recovery Pyramid

The emotion of sadness is a signal that you have experienced a loss. You need to quickly and accurately recognize that emotion and use the energy it generates to help you take appropriate action and move through grief recovery at a pace that is right for you. In general, appropriately grieving loss episodes in your own life can increase the likelihood that you can truly help others deal with theirs.

There can be a vast difference between the grieving process useful in preparation for one's own death and grief recovery that is effective for the survivors of loss. The Kubler-Ross work has been landmark in helping individuals prepare to die with dignity. The Grief Recovery Pyramid, on the other hand, is designed to help survivors move through grief recovery successfully—even gracefully.



Grief Recovery Pyramid Stages

<p>Stage I - Shock</p> <p>Symptoms may last from a few days to several weeks and can include:</p> <p>Agitation, confusion, collapse, crying Denial or disbelief, euphoria or hysteria Insomnia, lethargy or weakness Loss of appetite, nausea Numbness or unreality</p>	<p>Suggestions for action:</p> <p>Feel and show grief, talk it out Access your support system Ask for help, allow others to help you Do not make any major decisions Rest and survive, avoid substance abuse Be around living things, spend time in nature</p>
<p>Stage II – Distress</p> <p>Symptoms may last from a few weeks to two years and symptoms can include:</p> <p>Anger, anguish, anxiety, crying, confusion Fear, guilt, mood swings Hopelessness; life seems to be in <i>limbo</i>, low self-esteem Insomnia, restlessness Irrational decision-making, poor judgment Loneliness, isolation Pain, physical illness Overeating, undereating, improper diet Slowed thinking, suicidal thoughts</p>	<p>Suggestions for action:</p> <p>Beware of rebounding, seek and accept counseling Acknowledge and verbalize emotional pain Keep decision-making to a minimum, check with others Get a physical examination, avoid substance abuse Allow yourself to mourn; try journaling Accept the support/assistance of others Return to career or volunteer work Heal at your own pace, Plan for good nutrition Get plenty of rest and exercise</p>
<p>Stage III – Acceptance</p> <p>Time lines will vary for each individual. Symptoms can include:</p> <p>Distress becomes less acute, have only periodic <i>crashes</i> Feel stronger and more energetic Physical symptoms decrease, nostalgia replaces emotional pain, loneliness surfaces intermittently Interests return, are more comfortable with the self Return to optimum functioning</p>	<p>Suggestions for action:</p> <p>Avoid hanging on to the episode of loss and grief Exercise consistently and pamper yourself regularly Let go of <i>might-have-beens</i> Forgive yourself and others Socialize; include new people, develop new interests Take control of your own life Learn to <i>act</i> rather than <i>react</i></p>

Gender Differences

Studies show that males often move to anger when the emotions of fear or sadness arise (whether or not anger is the appropriate emotion for the situation). Females, on the other hand, often move directly to sadness when the emotions of anger or fear arise). Not only can this be unhelpful to the individual who is misidentifying the emotion, it can be a source of conflict and misunderstanding, especially at a time supportive cross-gender communication is vitally important.

Males and females often exhibit widely differing coping strategies and styles of behaviors in situations of loss and grief. Because of societal expectations that males should remain in control of their emotions at all times (essentially be silent about them) males may fail to articulate their grief. The unexpressed pain can trigger an emotional retreat into stony silence, attempts at suicide, or violent behaviors. Unresolved grief from the past can increase the intensity of their reaction to present episodes of loss. They may react out of proportion to the situation at hand because of their accumulated slush-fund of stored, unresolved emotional pain.

Females, on the other hand, have been socialized to express grief aloud and encounter fewer taboos against crying. They may avoid taking constructive action, believing that talking is enough even when taking action could help them to cope more effectively. They can become stuck in recounting the loss and develop the habit of brooding. This enmeshment can delay acceptance and resolution and lead to immobility.

Summary of Stereotypical Grieving Styles by Gender

<p>Females:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally exhibit more of an experience-oriented style of grieving • Tend to be more comfortable articulating their loss and grief, verbalizing it to friends and family • Have often been socialized to be more comfortable expressing grief through tears • May rehearse endlessly and actually over process, believing that <i>talking</i> about it is enough and that no action is required • May focus on the needs of others to the exclusion of taking good care of themselves (e.g., may fail to pamper themselves appropriately during recovery) • May brood endlessly and fail to take constructive action that could help them to cope more effectively <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to take constructive action whether or not they feel like it at the moment • Avoid perpetually indulging negative feelings and brooding endlessly over the incident 	<p>Males:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally exhibit more of a goal-oriented grieving style of grieving • Tend to be less comfortable verbalizing their grief, and would rather <i>fix</i> the loss rather than discuss it • May act out their grief (crash the car, get drunk, kick the cat, engage in high-risk behaviors) • Tend to distance themselves from what reminds them of the loss, or run away from it (physically or emotionally) when the loss can't be fixed • May try to escape the emotional pain through work or other activities (e.g., TV, movies, sports, sex, food, drugs, sleep) • May allow unresolved loss to build up inside where it can explode later on when another loss occurs <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to communicate verbally and articulate grief, to act out feelings in an appropriate manner • Engage in effective grief recovery, realizing that emotional pain is not likely to resolve on its own
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Due to the great disparity in grieving styles between the genders, it's no surprise that some relationships fall apart when loss occurs. Even when the partners do not separate they may misread each other's messages and fail to offer the support, acceptance, and nurturing that are so vital for healthy healing and recovery. Males and females need to learn from each other's strengths, share the burden of loss, recognize stereotypical gender tendencies, and encourage one another in implementing effective recovery strategies.

Helping Children Deal with Loss

Loss can be overwhelming for children. They may exhibit this by going from being quiet to noisy (or vice versa), or from caring to aggressive or stoic. They may experience nightmares or sleep-walking, become easily upset, become frantic when care providers are out of sight, or revert to more infantile behaviors (e.g., thumb sucking, bed wetting). To the extent that you are comfortable with your own grief recovery you will be able to role model an appropriate process for them.

Here are some suggestions for actions you can take to help children deal with loss effectively:

- Provide opportunities for them to talk about how they feel. Accept that what they feel is reality for them at this time. Listen without judgment and be patient. It can sometimes be helpful to offer feedback later on rather than immediately after they have verbalized their feelings.
- Encourage them to express their feelings by drawing, taking pictures, journaling, or working on crafts.
- Role model using words that express emotions; words such as afraid, sad, or angry. Also use words that express happiness and pleasure at having known the person or pet (if death was involved).
- Let them know that tears are okay and can be helpful in the grieving process, regardless of gender. Avoid pushing them to cry but reaffirm that tears are a natural brain phenomenon that are a gesture of deep emotion if they do exhibit tears.
- Reassure them that you expect to be there to take care of them. Remind them of other people in their lives that also expect to be there to help them grow up safely (e.g., aunts, uncles, cousins, good friends, teachers).
- Give them hope for the future. Write on the calendar activities for next week, month, and year. The upcoming "carrot" can help them see past the loss in the immediate present and visualize the future.
- Maintain familiar routines as much as possible to help promote a sense of security and stability. Knowing what is going to happen (e.g., dinner is at 6pm, grocery shopping happens Wednesday evening), can reduce a tendency to carry a sense of uncertainty into every aspect of life.
- Help them to experience a sense of being in control over something (e.g., clothing selections, foods, games). If it is inappropriate for them to be in complete control, at least give them some choice about a portion of the event, activity, or situation.
- Avoid isolating from others. Schedule time with friends and relatives. Reminisce about the happy and sad. If the loss involves a person or pet, tell stories about them. Laugh about funny things that happened with them in the past. If tears come even while you are laughing, accept that. Both joy and loss are part of living.
- Allow them to participate in doing something to improve the situation for others (e.g., visiting a friend, taking flowers to the hospital, writing a letter, making phone calls, donating food to homeless).

- Include them in your grief recovery process. Be authentic. Allow them to see frailty as well as strength. Children often have a sense about what is “real” and what isn’t. Avoid frightening them with your grief and, at the same time, include them as you go through the process.

Strategies for Recovering from Your Losses

1. **Create a loss history.** Include all losses, even small ones (so called), with dates and locations. Loss and grief can be cumulative! Avoid denial, mislabeling, and minimizing.
2. **Verbalize your loss.** Use real words and avoid euphemisms. Actively engage in grief recovery. Know that we all experience loss in life and we can recover from those losses. Allow yourself to experience all your emotions—they give you valuable information—knowing that you don’t have to take overt action on any of them.
3. **Stop blaming.** This includes yourself as well as others. Most people did the best they could at the time with the tools they had. Even if they were evil, you can’t change what happened. Giving up the need to blame, and just dealing with “what is,” allows you to be more open to the trauma that others may be experiencing. It can give you the opportunity to pass along what you have learned to someone else.
4. **Take responsibility for your own grief recovery.** This doesn’t mean you have to *go it alone*. It does mean no one can do it for you. Accept that death and loss are as much a part of life as birth and the process of acquiring.
5. **Access your support system.** Human beings are relational and spiritual creatures. Hopefully, you’ve already developed relationships with a few key people who can listen to you talk, provide helpful feedback, engage in selected activities with you, or just “be” with you as needed. Include a spiritual relationship with your Higher Power, as well.
6. **Celebrate the resilience of the human spirit.** Respect the memory of those who have died. Each one holds a position in your generational inheritance or in your life journey. Remember that you carry that memory in your mind and can call it up any time you choose. That is one way to keep them with you. Honor your own work in the face of loss, whatever that loss may be - and it does involve work!
7. **Look for the open door.** In life you always *get* something when you have to give something up. Find that something! When one door closes in life, avoid wasting time pounding on it. Instead, look for other options. Be alert to unexpected opportunities and take constructive action.

Speaker Information



Others may not remember exactly what you said, or did, or even how you looked, but their brains will always remember how they felt in your presence. —Arlene Taylor

Who is Arlene Taylor...and what do her seminars have to offer you?

If you ask Arlene Taylor what she does in life that absolutely energizes her, she will likely reply, “I’m a brain-function specialist and I help people thrive!” Indeed, she incorporates cutting-edge brain-function research into her empowering seminars. Her presentations highlight strategies that, practically applied, can help you to be more successful—by design. Audiences around the world have found her to be an engaging and imaginative speaker.

A recipient of the American Medal of Honor for Brain-Function Education (American Biographical Institute Inc., 2002), Taylor holds earned doctorates in Health & Human Services with an emphasis in women’s issues; and in Clinical Pastoral Counseling with an emphasis in issues of abuse, addiction, and recovery. She was selected as Alumna of the year in 1989 by the Loma Linda University Alumni Association and has been included in multiple Who’s Who publications. A member of the National Speakers Association, Taylor is listed with the Professional Speakers Bureau International.

Access her web site (www.arlenetaylor.org) for seminar descriptions/calendar, *Taylor-on-the-Brain Bulletin*, resources, *SynapSez*® newsletter, Selected Brain Facts, Frequently Asked Questions, and more.

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