

Facing Grief

The emotions we face in a time of tragedy and pain can feel overwhelming and difficult to understand. The following information is from “The Lutheran Handbook” pages 120-122. While this information can’t fix or take away your pain and grief, it can give you some insight into normal responses to loss and tragedy and offers some ideas for how you can offer consolation to others.

How to Cope With Loss and Grief

1. **Familiarize yourself with the stages of grief.**

Experts identify five: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Some add hope as a sixth stage. Grieving persons cycle back and forth through the stages, sometimes experiencing two or three in a single day. This is normal.

2. **Express your grief.**

Healthy ways may include crying, staring into space for extended periods, ruminating, shouting at the ceiling, and sudden napping. Laughing outbursts are also appropriate and should not be judged harshly.

3. **Identify someone you trust to talk to.**

Available people can include a spouse, parents, relatives, friends, a pastor, a doctor, or a trained counselor.

4. **Choose a personal way to memorialize the loss.**

Make a collage of photographs or start a scrapbook of memories to memorialize the event. This helps you to begin to heal without getting stuck in your grief.

Be Aware

- The pain immediately after suffering a loss is usually deep and intense. This will lessen with the passage of times.
- Even Jesus cried when his friend Lazarus died (John 11:35).

How To Console Someone

Consolation is a gift from God. Christians in turn give it to others to build up the body of Christ and preserve it in times of trouble (See 2 Corinthians 1:4-7.)

- 1. Listen first.**
Make it known that you're present and available. When the person opens up, be quiet and attentive.
- 2. Be ready to help the person face grief and sadness, not avoid him or her.**
The object is to help the person name, understand, and work through his or her feelings, not gloss over them.
- 3. Avoid saying things to make yourself feel better.**
"I know exactly how you feel," is seldom true and trivializes the sufferer's pain. Even if you have experienced something similar, no experience is exactly the same. If there is nothing to say, simply be present with the person.
- 4. Show respect with honesty.**
Don't try to answer the mysteries of the universe or force your beliefs on the person. Be clear about the limitations of your abilities. Be ready to let some questions go unanswered. Consolation isn't about having all the answers, it's about bearing one another's burdens.
- 5. Don't put words in God's mouth.**
Avoid saying, "This is God's will," or "This is part of God's plan." Unless you heard it straight from God, don't say it.

Romans 8:38-39

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (NRSV)