

DEALING WITH PAIN AND LOSSES

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DUAL PROCESS MODEL OF GRIEF

- The Dual Process Model of Grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1999), describes grief in terms of oscillation between two contrasting modes that vary enormously from one moment to another, and from one individual (or cultural group) to another:
- a) 'loss orientation': this involves emotion-focused coping - exploring and expressing the full range of emotional reactions to loss.
- b) 'restoration orientation': this involves problem-focused coping - dealing with external adjustments required by the loss, and ongoing life demands.

TASK-BASED MODEL

The Task-Based Model of Worden (2008) conceptualizes grieving in terms of four ongoing tasks:

- (1) accepting the reality of the loss;
- (2) processing the emotional, spiritual and psychological pain of grieving;
- (3) adjusting to a new life without the deceased; and
- (4) forging a psychological connection with the deceased even while building a new life.

THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross described the stages of grief as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although she was referring to death and dying, these stages apply to all types of loss. These stages are not discrete and well-defined, most people don't experience them all, and they don't occur in a fixed order. They tend to ebb and flow and blend into one another, and often they seem to end but then start again. Whatever your loss, you will experience at least some of these stages.

FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE

Amid the chaos of a major loss, we'll all experience some unpleasant physical reactions—the well-known “fight or flight” response. And some of us will also experience the lesser known “freeze” response.

So when significant losses occur, we'll all have a fight-or-flight response. Most commonly this manifests as fear and anxiety (flight), but sometimes anger will predominate (fight). And in the most severe cases, if our nervous system perceives that fight or flight is futile, we'll go into freeze mode, literally freezing up, unable to move or speak. We may even black out or have an out-of-body experience.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

The truth is, most of us don't cope well with loss. We're easily hooked by those painful thoughts, feelings, memories, and physical reactions; they jerk us around and pull us into self-defeating behaviors. For example, we might overuse drugs and alcohol, withdraw from our friends and family, drop out of activities we used to enjoy, fight with the people we love, hide away from the world, or spend too much time in bed and on the couch.

All of these behaviors are normal—and extremely common.

The problem is that they usually make things worse rather than better.

HERE'S THE GOOD NEWS:

We can change this state of affairs; we can learn new and more effective ways of responding to grief, loss, and crisis.

However, before we go any further, I really need to emphasize two points. First, there is no single “right” or “appropriate” reaction to a major loss. Everyone reacts differently, so please let go of any preconceived ideas about what you should or shouldn't feel, and how long it should or shouldn't last.

There's no "delete button" in the brain; no way to eliminate painful memories, but over time, as you (1)treat yourself kindly and (2)allow your memories to be present without a struggle, you're likely to notice two things: (a)they'll appear less often, and (b)they'll steadily lose their impact.

Our minds naturally tend to judge, criticize, and beat us up; to pull out a big stick and give us a beating; to kick us when we're already down. Our minds may tell us we're not being strong enough, we should be handling things better, or others are far worse off than we are, so we have nothing to complain about. They may tell us to get a grip, sort ourselves out, or stop being weak or pathetic. Sometimes our minds may even say that we are to blame for our loss.

WHAT IS SELF-COMPASSION?

There are many definitions of *self-compassion*, and they all boil down to this: **acknowledge your pain, respond with kindness.**

Self-compassion means recognizing that you're in pain and then doing something kind, caring, and supportive to help ease your suffering.

If we can learn how to treat ourselves kindly, we'll be much better at handling our pain and dealing with all those problems life just dumped on us.

Yet many people initially dismiss self-compassion. They may think it's flowery, airy-fairy, New Age, hippy-ish, or touchy-feely. Some see it as psychobabble without any scientific validity. Others perceive it as a religious practice. Men may see it as "effeminate" or "unmanly." And gender aside, many people see it as "weak," "soft," or "not really dealing with your problems."

There's nothing weak or unmanly about being kind to a friend who's in great pain, so shouldn't the same be true when we're kind to ourselves?

And the research tells us that self-compassion actually helps us deal with our problems; it helps us regroup and recharge so we have the motivation and energy to take effective action.

KIND SELF-TALK

Kind self-talk has two main elements:

1. acknowledge your pain
2. respond with kindness

THE FIRST STEP: ACKNOWLEDGE PAIN

Acknowledging our pain simply means being honest with ourselves about just how much this hurts—without dwelling on it, wallowing in it, or turning it into self-pity.

One way to do this is to create a short, easy-to-remember phrase that also helps us step back a little from our suffering. Phrases such as “Here is...,” “I’m noticing...,” “I’m having...” are particularly useful. For example, “Here is sadness,” “I’m noticing anger,” “I’m having feelings of despair.”

Play around with these words and come up with a phrase that works for you. Kristin Neff, the world’s top researcher on self-compassion, likes to say, “This is a moment of suffering.” There’s something poetic in this phrase that appeals to many people. However, some people prefer everyday language.

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR PAIN

Take a moment to notice any difficult feelings that are present right now and label them: anger, sadness, anxiety, loneliness, and so on.

And then, very slowly, using a calm, kind, peaceful inner voice, acknowledge it: *I’m noticing...* or *Here is....*

Now pause for a moment, and take a slow and gentle breath, in and out.

And now, try this once more.

Very slowly, in a calm, kind, peaceful inner voice, acknowledge it: *I’m noticing...* or *Here is....*

THE SECOND STEP: RESPOND WITH KINDNESS

The next step, after we acknowledge our pain, is to remind ourselves to respond with kindness

May I be kind to myself

**DROP THE STRUGGLE -
EXPERIMENT**

THE ACE FORMULA: ACKNOWLEDGE, CONNECT, ENGAGE

A: Acknowledge Your Thoughts and Feelings

C: Connect with Your Body

E: Engage in What You're Doing

NOTICE AND NAME

- Naming the thought
- Naming the pattern
- Naming the painful memory
- Naming the story
- Naming the emotion and sensations



MAKE A ROOM – ACCEPT
(METAPHOR)



BE KIND - EXPERIMENT

So, if you *have* acknowledged your pain, responded with kindness, and done what you can to improve the situation, then it may *now* be time to consider several questions:

- *How can I learn or grow from this experience?*
- *What personal qualities could I develop?*
- *What practical skills might I learn or improve?*
- *What strengths can I develop?*
- *What relationships can I deepen?*

ON JOY AND SORROW – KHALIL JOBTRAN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZmlbPJm6pE>

Life is a great privilege, and we are challenged to make the most of it.

Can we let our values guide us, can we treat ourselves kindly, make room for both our sorrow and our joy, and engage fully in the great and ever-changing stage show of life? Yes, we can—though we will often forget to do this. But whenever we *do* remember, we have a choice. We can hold ourselves kindly, drop anchor, and take a stand. And right there, in that moment, we can find treasure; it's always there, even when life hits hard.

THANK YOU