



# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

## Grief

*"All through our life we weave countless ties, often without knowing it. These ties play a cognitive as well as an affective role: each in its own way tells us who we are and where we are at in the adventure of life. Their function is also to secure us. When a loss arises, insecurity settles in along with distress and anxiety. We are then in grief."*

Jean-Luc Héту

Everyone has known grief at one point in his or her life. Grief does not result only from death; it is an emotion or a set of emotions that we feel when the loss of someone or something we deeply care for occurs. An amputee who has lost a leg grieves; so does a young man who loses his girlfriend or someone who retires or quits a job. Each time we lose someone or something that has provided emotional satisfaction, we risk grief. Therefore, we are all destined to go through this sorrowful experience. Pain may be good or bad in the sense that there is a positive and negative way to live through this sad experience. Linderman says that a grieving person must work to recover step by step in order to overcome grief and thus free himself or herself from pain.

### The grieving process and its dynamics

The grieving person goes through three different phases. What is important to remember is that one has to express his or her feelings when grieving. The pain has to make its way. The first phase of grieving is the critical phase. It corresponds to a crisis. People often say "This is impossible" and

"Why is this happening to me?" because the pain is too great. At that point, the person enters into a kind of torpor, negation, numbness. The emotions are intense and need to be expressed. In this phase, the person needs listening to, an attentive ear and a warm presence.

The second phase is called the crucial phase. In this phase the person has to let go, to break the ties with the past. He or she feels isolated and cut off from others. The person is afraid of not being able to get out of it. He or she also experiences a lot of guilt, even hostility, toward others and even himself or herself. It is important to break this isolation and let the grieving person share and exchange actual experiences and emotions which are so difficult to live through and express. It is often in this phase that grieving paralyzes a person and he or she stops moving forward. He or she stops feeling good without the other person, or job, or pet, which was so dear.

The third phase is the creative phase. In this phase, the grieving person creates a new lifestyle, and finds the energy to let go of the past and move forward. The person opens himself or herself to a new world of projects and challenges.

### Grieving and its consequences on daily life

We often hear that grief heals with time. Time allows grief to dim, diminish, be rationalized. A very recent grief is not experienced with the same intensity as a two-year-old

grief – time sorts things out. However, the space that grief takes is also important. By giving grief all the space it needs in daily life, the person can give vent to emotions and feelings. By managing the suffering and the emotional pain linked to losses of any kind, the actual reality sinks in. This is where grief becomes accessible.

### The importance of managing one's grief

Grieving is an experience of detachment and affective disinvesting which leads a person to a new adaptation. This is a life experience which is determining because it leaves traces at the psychological and physical levels. Following grief, many people go through a depressive state. Others have a lot of difficulty living in the present, escaping through work, drugs or medication, because their suffering is unbearable.

"To live a grieving experience gave me a better understanding of life."

The fact of not escaping the suffering and the pain leads us to more tolerance toward ourselves and others and to more listening and compassion. Grief is part of our life and living one's grief is part of living one's life.

If you are dealing with grief or experiencing other difficulties in your life and would like to talk to a professional, contact our 24-hour



service at 1-800-268-7708 or, for the hearing impaired, dial 1-800-567-5803.

