Grief is a natural emotional reaction to loss of any kind. Our lives are different after a loss and how we cope varies from person to person.

The Employee Assistance Program is a service available to assist in the healing process.
The Tasks of Mourning

In his book, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, J. William Worden presents the idea that there are four tasks in the mourning process that must be addressed for a sense of closure or completion. Keep in mind that this is one of a number of theories in approaching a death or loss and there is no one “right” or “wrong” way to grieve. Worden’s unique approach is as follows:

**Task 1: Accept the Reality of the Loss**

Shortly after a person dies, a bereaved person may engage in searching behavior. Examples of this behavior include: expecting the deceased person to call or seemingly catching a glimpse of the deceased person crossing the road or in line at the store. Behaviors that contribute to the work of this task include those such as attending a funeral or memorial service or going through the process of sorting through personal belongings. This task is completed once a person comes to the belief that reunion in this life with the deceased person is not possible.

**Task 2: Work Through the Pain of Grief**

The pain of grief may be physical, emotional and behavioral. Pain in grief may manifest as a range of emotions including but not limited to: sadness, anxiety, guilt, anger, fear, despair, hopelessness, blame, shame, relief and loneliness. During this time it is important to acknowledge and process these emotions with the hope and goal that at some point in the future the intensity of emotions will decrease or pass. The griever is cautioned to refrain from avoidance and numbing as primary modes of grieving. At times these may seem to be a desired choice; however, these behaviors and responses tend to only delay the process and may even increase the possibility of a complicated grief reaction.

**Task 3: Adjust to an Environment in Which the Deceased is Missing**

**External Adjustment**

The person who died had many roles. Some of these roles included activities or behaviors that now another person must take on. Examples of these might include an exercise partner or possibly the person who maintained the yard or managed the finances. Some of these roles are not easily filled. Some may not be able to be filled such as the role of a child.

**Internal Adjustment**

The person left is now challenged with adjustment to their own sense of self. "Who am I?" now that this person has died. I used to be a “caregiver”, a “parent”, “loved in a way that no one else can love me.” How do I define myself in the absence of this person or with the absence of this relationship?

**Spiritual Adjustment**

After a death, a person may question their “fundamental life values and philosophical beliefs.” During this time the bereaved person may look for a sense of purpose or meaning related to the loss. There may be a reappraisal of values and beliefs. Some deaths or losses fit our expectations. An example might be a peaceful death with minimal suffering following a long, fully lived life. Some deaths do not fit our expectations. These might include a violent death, one that seems out of order such as a child dying before a parent or an unexpected death.

**Task 4: Find an Enduring Connection with the Deceased while Embarking on a New Life.**

This task challenges the living person to engage in an ongoing relationship with the thoughts and memories of the deceased person while simultaneously engaging in their present life as well as planning for the future. The hope at this point is that memories and thoughts of the person who has died produce a smile or a welcome emotion rather than an unwanted emotion or intense pain.

Now you may wonder, “How does someone know if they have completed the process?” Good question. One indicator that you have completed the tasks is when you are able to think about your loved one without pain. Another is when you can reinvest your emotions into life and the living. The length of time it takes a person to work through the tasks will vary and is dependent upon a number of factors including: the relationship the bereaved had with the deceased, circumstances surrounding the death, and how the bereaved person approaches life in general.

It is important to recognize that people grieve in different ways. Some people welcome external support and participate in a support group or seek individual therapy or counsel to guide them through their grief. Some people grieve more privately and spend time internally reflecting and processing. Many people use creative outlets as a way to express their emotions: painting, drawing, journaling, music.

Hopefully, a better understanding of the grief process can help with the challenging adjustments to death and loss. Remember the EAP is one resource readily available to you to aid in this process.

~Amy Cates, LCSW
COPING WITH WORKPLACE CHANGE

~Emily Durham, LPC, CEAP

“The only constant is change, continuing change, inevitable change...” Isaac Asimov. People experience significant changes in their lives every day in relationships, jobs, finances, responsibilities, etc. Then why is change so often difficult and painful? Change is often experienced as a kind of death. An end or loss of the way things were - a death to a particular way of life - and grief is a universal response to death. Grief is the experience of letting go, of saying farewell to something loved and familiar.

Changes in our workplace, job, or profession present unique challenges to our ability to cope. Work provides to the individual a sense of identity, purpose, and stability. Drastic changes in this area of life often bring on a period of mourning as we make the inevitable transitions and accommodations necessary to survive and hopefully, to ultimately, thrive.

This grief is experienced on many levels. Grief can affect us physically, causing such symptoms as sleep and appetite disturbance, fatigue, and even actual illness. Grief can affect us cognitively - altering our perspective, causing intrusive or obsessive thoughts, limiting our ability to concentrate and make good decisions. Primarily, grief affects our feelings. A whirlwind of intense emotions can threaten to overwhelm us. Anger, fear, denial, guilt, despair, confusion, sorrow... may all be part of our grief process. Grieving is not a weakness - it is the process through which we must journey to heal from our losses and move forward in our lives.

Grief is not a linear process and no two people grieve in exactly the same way. There is no right or wrong to this process and no particular time limit. What we can do is be proactive in our own healing - taking our next right step as we move through the process:

◊ Surround ourselves with supportive, positive people - constant negativity is a drain we cannot afford.
◊ Learn all we can about what the changes require and evaluate how these changes will actually impact us in our day to day routines.
◊ Decide we will survive these circumstances and our own intense emotions. Find a peaceful place to "feel our feelings" and consider the path forward.
◊ Now or later find a place to talk about our experience. A trusted friend, a loving spouse or a supportive counselor can provide a safe place to explore feelings. Telling our story is an essential part of healing.
◊ Take control of the small things that are within our power - finding ways to demonstrate and validate our value in the workplace.
◊ Continue to take good care of ourselves physically - sufficient food, sleep and exercise will keep our bodies strong in this difficult time.
◊ Continue to do our work - there is power and healing in the act of doing.

There will be good days and bad days as we adjust to the changes in our work life. Eventually we will find a new place of comfort and stability. We will find ourselves concentrating more on the world around us and less on our feelings of loss. We learn that we really are strong, we really can endure and that our lives, though changed, will go on.

“All changes have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another.”

~ Anatole France
It can be difficult to explain death to a child, especially when you are grieving yourself. Nevertheless, children need our help to understand and learn how to cope. Children are very literal and need clear explanations of death. It is often our tendency to soften what we say to children by saying things like, “He went to sleep,” “He passed away,” or “We lost him.” By phrasing things this way we are trying to lessen the negative impact of grief for ourselves and our children. However, these phrases often confuse children who are very literal. Children may assume, for instance, that their loved one will eventually wake up or that if they look hard enough they will be able to find their loved one again. Children need concrete explanations of what death is. For example, in a gentle way, you might say, "When a person dies, his or her body stops working. The heart stops beating and the body stops moving, eating, and breathing." If a child insists that they can call the person or see them soon, it may be helpful to say things like, “Wouldn’t that be nice if we could call them or see them right now? But we can’t anymore.” Then give the child a way they can try to connect by telling a story they remember about the person or something special they miss about the person.

Children may experience a wide range of feelings — anger, sadness, hopelessness, disappointment, confusion, loneliness, guilt, worry — but they may not always have the words to identify these emotions. Assure your child over and over that everyone, including yourself, has lots of different feelings, and there are no feelings we can’t talk about. Take time to listen to your child and give them outlets for expressing their feelings.

Drawing pictures can be a great way for younger children to communicate. For older children writing in a journal may be helpful. If necessary, provide an outlet for your children to express anger or frustration. You might allow them to run outside, or give them play dough to pound on, beanbags to throw, or musical instruments with which to create noise. Listening to slow, soothing music and taking deep breaths can also help children feel more calm and relaxed. Some children may not want to talk about what happened right away; other children may want to talk to everyone about their feelings. The truth is that every person in your family may have a different way of communicating their feelings. Sometimes, children’s reactions when coping with the death and absence of a parent can be especially severe. Some common feelings or behaviors might persist, grow in intensity, or occur more frequently, signaling a need for extra attention. If your children experience any concerning difficulties such as bed-wetting or nightmares, or display behaviors that may be harmful to themselves or others, remember that it’s OK to seek professional help.

~ Heather Chapman-Henry, LCSW, RPT

Help for the Grieving Child

The Invisible String
Patrice Karst
Illustrated by Geoff Stevenson
Copyright © 2012 Patrice Karst
Illustrated by Geoff Stevenson
Family Activity: Memory Box

This is a great activity for families to do together during the grief process:

**Materials Needed:**
- Any kind of small, plain box (wood or cardboard)
- Hot glue
- Blank strips of paper
- Pictures of the loved one or even magazine pictures or words that remind you of the person you lost, things that person liked, etc.
- Any other craft items (ribbons, sequins, wrapping paper, feathers, beads, etc.)

This is a great activity for the whole family to do together. Tell participants that you will all be making a memory box so that you can honor and remember the person who died. You will decorate the box with things that remind you of the person (i.e. use colors they liked, words they used to say, pictures of your favorite memory of them, etc.). Try not to censor or change what your child wants to put on and around the box. When a child gets to pick the items that go on the box, it gives them a feeling of control that can be very healing during a time of loss. Once the box is complete, each person can write their favorite memory of that person on a blank strip of paper and place it inside the box. Family members can also write something they want to tell or ask the deceased person and put it in the box. This is a way to remember the deceased person, but is also a way for the child to feel they can continue to connect to the person who died. Place the box in a common place in the house so that any time anyone wants to add a memory, ask a question or tell the deceased person something, they can write it down and place it in the box.

I have had clients open the box on the anniversary of the person’s death and read some of the thoughts and memories inside the box. This is a special way to connect as a family as well as a way to stay connected to the person who died.

**Recommended Books for Children:**
- *The Invisible String* by: Patrice Karst
- *When Dinosaurs Die* by: Laurie Krashy Brown
- *Where Are You?* By: Laura Olivieri
- *I Miss You* by: Pat Thomas
- *Missing Mommy* by: Rebecca Cobb, Henry Holt and Co.
- *Lifetimes* by: Bryan Mellonie

**Resources:**
The Center for Good Mourning
goodmourning@archildrens.org
www.archildrens.org/live-healthy/the-center-for-good-mourning/
What will THE EMPTY NEST be like for you?

A CHANCE TO CELEBRATE new found freedom?

Or

A PAINFUL STAGE OF LIFE with overwhelming feelings of loss and sadness?

Chances are, for most of us, it will be something in between! Much has been said and written about the Empty Nest in recent years, even resulting in the identification of “The Empty Nest Syndrome,” defined as "a feeling of grief and loneliness that parents may feel when their children leave home for the first time.”

This stage of life indeed involves a loss. As with any loss, a knowledge of the natural states of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) can be applicable and helpful. It is important to allow yourself the time and opportunity to grieve, making sure you have a good support system for this, and treating yourself with TLC during the process.

“Like most change,” writes psychologist and family therapist, Marie Hartwell-Walker Ed.D., the Empty Nest “can present an opportunity or a crisis,” depending on how the parent responds. She goes on to elaborate:

IT’S AN OPPORTUNITY:

For more spontaneity. With no day to day parenting obligations, you can do things like go to a movie on Wednesday night or take off for a weekend on short notice.

To stop being a role model (at least once in a while). With no children in the house, if you want cheese dip and ice cream for dinner, you aren’t falling down on your job as a parent.

For developing your own interests. The years you spent investing in your children’s lives left little time for your own hobbies and interests. It’s wonderful to be able to read for a whole evening, to take up an instrument, or to actually finish a project in a few weeks instead of a few years.

For buying things for yourself. With no one needing new sneakers or field trip money or whatever, it’s wonderful to be able to buy ourselves treats now and then.

To reconnect with your partner in a new way. With no children at home, partners can once again have longer and more meaningful conversations. They can rediscover each other and take their relationship to a new level.

For more intimacy. With no risk of discovery by a child, it’s possible again to make love in the afternoon and to enjoy those personal intimacies and connections that are part of adult romance.

IT CAN BE A CRISIS:

If the kids have been the primary focus of your life. As important as it is to love our children and love the job of parenting, it’s also a stage of life, not the whole of it. Your purpose for those 18-plus years has reached an endpoint. Now it’s time to redefine the relationship with the child, the spouse if there is one, and with the self. Grieving the life stage and the loss of all the activity and daily emotional connection can go on too long if there aren’t some things and some people to take its place. If your grieving lasts more than a few months after the last child leaves home, it’s probably a good idea to see a counselor to help you through it.

If other parents on the bleachers were your only friends. Many parents can’t find the time to develop real adult friendships when in the thick of parenting. When the children leave, they find themselves with few or even no meaningful and deep adult relationships.

If the kids were a distraction from things going wrong with your relationship. When the kids leave, some couples find themselves looking at each other and seeing a stranger. Left to themselves, all the little irritations and big disagreements that have been left unattended come into focus. Sometimes such couples can take a deep breath, have some very painful and yet productive conversations, and make the changes they need to make to face the next stage of life together. Sometimes they need the help and support of a couple’s counselor to know even where to begin.

If you didn’t prepare the kids to be independent. Kids who were over-parented want their parents to continue to help them with their papers and bail them out when they overspend. Doing so, however, will further impede their growing up and will prevent you from moving to the next stage of life.

If you are depressed by the idea that you are no longer needed as an active parent. It’s time to find another way to relate to others and to feel good about yourself.

So…..Opportunity or Crisis?

Parenting is a wonderful, joyful, frustrating, humbling and important stage of life. Certainly, staying in touch and relating to our children as adults should be part of the next stage. Soon it will be our kids’ turn to be partners and parents and it’s our turn to rediscover ourselves.

Whether this new life stage is an opportunity or crisis is up to us. One of the marvelous things about being human is that we can decide what we want to do next. Sometimes we have enough perspective and personal resources to do it on our own. If we’re in crisis, we may need to reach for some professional help to say goodbye to that chapter and hello to a new one. However it happens, it’s yet another chance to grow.

~Nancy Culbertson, LPC

There are 2 gifts we give our children: one is roots & the other is wings
The Secondary Losses of Grief

Everyone experiences losses in life – big losses - primary losses – such as the death of a loved one, divorce, job loss, relationship break-up, aging, abuse, chronic or acute illness just to name a few. As a result of these primary losses secondary losses can also occur. For instance, if divorce is a primary loss for a person, the secondary losses are numerous, especially if children are involved. The dream of growing old together and of having a nuclear family that lasts a lifetime changes; a person’s beliefs and world views are challenged. There is a loss of identity as a married person. Difficult situations can present in the future, such as the loss associated with visitation schedules, missed holidays and missed special occasions with the children.

It is important to identify the less obvious losses that follow a primary loss because they are often overlooked and can cause significant pain with consequences weeks, months or even years later. These losses may be difficult to identify or understand. Becoming aware of and responding to these losses can bring relief and pave the way for growth and meaning.

Ideally, secondary losses will be acknowledged as they are experienced and resolved. However, this can be challenging because they aren’t always easily recognized and may not have rituals or ceremonies to mark or honor them. There are many different possible losses a person may experience after a primary loss:

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There is no right way to grieve nor is there a normal timetable for grieving. Secondary losses can cause complicated emotions, difficulty in daily functioning, or hinder the ability to move forward. Common symptoms of primary and secondary grief to watch for include:

Sadness/Depression
Guilt
Anger
Fear/Anxiety
Social Isolation
Substance Abuse
Cognitive Problems
Physical Problems
Spiritual Problems

You can help yourself recognize and prepare for these losses by asking yourself how the primary loss has changed your life. What has been given up? How have your health and circumstances been affected? How have your relationships changed?

Plan ahead for grief triggers such as anniversaries, holidays and milestones that may reawaken painful feelings. Awareness is essential for acceptance and healing to occur. Finally, if needed, seek out a qualified counselor who can help you overcome obstacles to your grieving and work toward resolution.

~Valerie McDermott, LCSW
Arkansas Employee Assistance Program is a benefit provided by your employer. Your employer contracts with AEAP as a result of a commitment to the well-being of valued employees. The EAP provides counseling, information, and referrals (if indicated) for employees and their immediate family members. EAPs are ideal for individuals and families experiencing personal distress or simply seeking to improve health and well-being.

- Short-term, solution focused counseling
- Free
- Confidential

AEAP has offices in Little Rock, Hot Springs, Ft. Smith, and Fayetteville as well as affiliate providers throughout the State of Arkansas.

Please feel free to contact us if you wish to make an appointment with one of our counselors.

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