

14 GRIEF EXPERIENCES with EXAMPLES by SHANTI VANI

Acute Grief. Acute grief is an immediate, intense, powerful, painful response to a loss. It tends to dominate the griever's life for a relatively short time. It eventually passes, but if not tended to, it can lead to chronic grief.

Example: Your friend goes swimming and drowns in a rip current.

Ambiguous Grief. There are two types:

- 1) The person is here physically, but absent mentally or emotionally. The body is alive, but the relationship is very different.

Example: Alzheimer's, dementia, mental illness, trauma response, addiction, alcoholism, brain damage, mental disability, coma, catatonic state.

- 2) The person is in your mind and heart, but absent physically. You may not know if they are dead or alive.

Example: Kidnapping, abduction, runaway, tsunami, volcano, fire, flood, landslide, lost in a coal mine, or at sea.

Ancestral Grief. Ancestral grief is passed down from generation to generation. Many families don't share sad, painful stories, so family secrets often remain hidden. We absorb them from our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents without knowing what happened.

Example: You know there is some history of violence with your grandparents, but no one is willing to tell you what happened. You may ask and be refused or hesitate to ask.

Anticipatory Grief. Anticipatory grief occurs before an impending death or separation. It may be that our person has an illness, behavior problems, or substance misuse. Fearful thoughts and feelings are normal. You may be diagnosed with anxiety disorder and given medication.

Example: Your husband is depressed, and you know he has a gun. You are afraid he will use it on you or himself and you just don't know what to do.

Bewildered Grief. In bewildered grief, the whole situation is baffling and confusing. You don't know what circumstances led up to the tragedy. You are curious about what happened, but at the same time you may not want to know the details. It's hard to sort things out.

Example: Your brother is shot and killed while selling a small bag of marijuana and you don't know who was involved or why this happened.

Chronic Grief. Chronic grief doesn't lighten up over time. It can be a way to hold onto the person and keep the memories alive. Sometimes in chronic grief, we think we will betray our deceased loved one if we feel good or happy. If we built our whole life around this person and didn't have other relationships, it can be more difficult.

Example: After a 60-year marriage and 10 years of caregiving, your spouse dies. You knew it would happen, but you are still not prepared after being together for so long.

Complicated Grief. Complicated grief has various aspects which make it confusing and hard to deal with. It can involve estrangement, broken family connections, difficult relationships, and a great deal of heartache. It can be so difficult that one may feel worthless or even suicidal. You want to blame yourself or someone else and you don't know where to turn.

Example: Your stepparent was violent and abusive to you and your parent. You felt powerless to change it and now you have a great deal of confusion and mixed feelings about their death.

Delayed Grief. In delayed grief, we wait until later to feel our emotions. We get busy taking care of the funeral, legal and financial business, and the person's stuff. Family, friends, work, lack of support, and avoiding our feelings are some reasons why we don't tend to our grief.

Example: A parent with young children whose spouse dies feels numb by day and overwhelmed by night. They just keep going to take care of work and family. Workplace policy only allows for three days of bereavement leave. They just keep delaying the grief.

Disenfranchised Grief. Disenfranchised grief involves being cut out of a chain of important connections. It happens in bullying, abandonment, divided families, and any situation in which one is being left out of important relationships. There is often shame involved. If the griever doesn't know why they are being rejected, it is especially painful. Online "ghosting" is common.

Examples: Adoption, adultery, abuse, addiction, incest, broken family, mental illness, abortion, suicide, incarceration, or criminal activity.

Environmental Grief. Environmental grief is both personal and collective. We are experiencing climate change and the resulting loss of treasured species. There are numerous geological events of destruction and devastation, which take a toll on our lives and resources. We have been warned of the danger of ignoring these problems and we tend to feel powerless.

Examples: Global warming, melting icebergs, abuse of farmlands, toxic chemicals, volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, famine, fires, and floods.

Maladaptive Grief. Maladaptive grief is dangerous, dysfunctional, and destructive. It involves extremes and may lead to obsession, compulsion, clinging, stalking, and violence. The maladaptive griever can be so focused on the loss that they are not behaving rationally.

Example: Kid that was bullied and shoots up a school, church, or shopping mall.

Traumatic Grief. Traumatic grief involves sudden, unexpected, violent, shocking, or unjust situations. The griever is jolted by the tragic nature of the event. It can cause a wide range of responses, including disbelief, rage, terror, numbness or disassociation.

Example: Someone drives into a crowd and kills your loved one. Your life has changed.

Unresolved Grief. In unresolved grief, there are important questions that have no answers. Initially, it is very difficult. We feel angry. We wonder who the people were and why they did what they did. We wonder so much about what happened, but we'll probably never know.

Example: Sister was always lying, stealing, and doing bad deeds. She is murdered and her sister wonders who the killer was and why the death occurred. She wishes her dead sister had used better judgment and wishes she had a chance to make things better in the sisters' relationship. There are mixed feelings and lingering confusion.

Vicarious Grief. Someone you care about has suffered a deep and significant loss. You are not personally connected with the person who is gone. You feel sympathy, empathy, and compassion for the griever, but don't know what to do. It is common in the general population, but especially difficult for first responders, health care workers, and funeral directors.

Example: A grandmother isn't close to her granddaughter but loves her very much. When the woman's baby drowns at a pool party, the grandmother feels vicarious grief.