



Factors that influence the ability to cope with losses

Many factors affect the intensity and duration of grief. Each person's grief will be determined by a unique combination of psychological, physiological and social qualities.

Influences from the past:

- Childhood experiences – especially losses of significant others
- Adolescent and adult experiences of loss and the recentness of such losses.
- The resolution of those losses.
- Previous mental health problems, bouts with depression, suicide attempts. Previous physical health problems, life crises or changes prior to this loss.

Nature of the relationship:

- Kinship (spouse, child, parent, etc.)
- Family of choice
- The role the deceased occupied
- Strength of attachment
- Security of the attachment
- Length of relationship
- Degree of dependency
- Intensity of ambivalence (love/hate)
- The unique nature and meaning of the loss.

How the loss occurred:

- Circumstances surrounding the loss
- Timeliness (when in life-cycle did loss occur)
- Previous warnings
- Preparation for bereavement (anticipatory grief)
- The bereaved's perception of preventability
- The bereaved's perception of the deceased's fulfillment in life
- Amount of unfinished business.



Influences in the present:

- Sex
- Age
- Role expectations (self-imposed or other-imposed)
 - The strong one
 - The expressive one
 - The detached one
- Coping behaviors, personality, and mental health
- Social, cultural, ethnic and religious/philosophical background including rituals
- The number, type and quality of secondary losses resulting from the loss
- The presence of other stresses or crises
- Amount of social support or isolation
- Present health and ability to care properly for oneself
- Emergent life opportunities.

These factors make grief a very personal, individual process and one that should not be compared with another's grief. Added guilt feelings arise when one attempts to compare his grief with another's. Someone is always grieving too much or not enough if one tries to compare

Note: Parts of this section were taken from Theresa Rando's book, "Grief, Dying and Death: Clinical intervention for Caregivers."