

COPING WITH CRISIS

TEACHER NOTE: Although this information is specifically geared toward death, it should be explained to the students that the steps of grief apply to any situation where one must cope with unexpected situations (divorce, serious illness, loss of car keys, term paper isn't finished on time, no date for the prom, etc.)

REACTIONS TO DEATH: In peacetime, two American families lose a family member to death every minute. Grief is the pain, discomfort, and mental and physical feeling that most persons feel following the death of a loved one. There are various reactions:

1. Physical Reactions—numbness, unfeeling, pain, tightness in the throat, disinterest in eating, can't sleep, being tired, etc.
2. Emotional Reactions—stabbing pain, sudden anger, sense of unfairness, feeling of relief, guilt, gladness, anger, hostility, fear, and anxiety.

MOURNING PROCESS: The mourning process is the means by which powerful emotions are brought under control. When the mourning process is successful, the dead person becomes a living memory (meaning one can remember the other without feeling grief or loss). There are three stages of mourning:

1. The first stage of mourning is that of SHOCK. This stage usually occurs between the time of death and the time the final arrangements are made for the body. During the shock period, one may deny that the death has occurred. Some people may collapse physically while others have violent emotional outbursts. Some people withdraw and wish to be alone.
2. The second stage of mourning is that of INTENSE PAIN and FEELINGS OF LOSS. This usually occurs two to three months after the death, for most people. The bereaved person may withdraw from the world. He/she may exist in a dream world. Restless sleep is often disturbed by many vivid dreams. Weight loss may be the result of poor appetite.
3. The final stage of mourning is called RESOLUTION. One starts living a regular life again. Eating and sleeping habits return to normal. Memories of the deceased bring joy and pleasure rather than the pain of grief.

ANTICIPATORY GRIEF: This term refers to the mourning process which begins before death occurs in cases of terminal illnesses. Family members prepare themselves for the upcoming death. The more grief that can be expressed before the death, the more bearable it will be afterwards. The mourning process is longer, but the emotions and physical reactions are usually less intense.

DEALING WITH DEATH

Strange as it may seem, death is a part of living. Where did you learn your ideas or views about death?

- Family
- Religious beliefs
- Superstitions
- Experiences with death
- Attitude toward life
- Mental health
- Media
- Science

