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Coping with Loss and Disappointment

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Loss is something that touches all of us. Losses and disappointments happen throughout the lifespan and affect personal and family lives. We often think of death when we think of loss but we lose our health, good friends who move away, jobs, and spouses through divorce. We suffer the disappointment of missed promotions, the loss of financial security, loss of our children and/or grandchildren through family disputes, and the list could go on. We face loss and disappointment regularly and never really stop to consider what is happening to us. Think about your own lives. Maybe you've suffered from a loss or disappointment and don't even realize it—you just thought that was how life was supposed to be.

Learning to recognize your losses and learning to deal with them can help you throughout your life as you face additional losses. You can find meaning in your losses and learn from your experiences, in spite of the pain.

Recognizing Losses

Many research studies have been conducted on the grieving process and handling death, but few studies have focused on managing the change brought about by disappointments and losses. Whenever we experience a change that requires giving up familiar patterns, we suffer a loss or disappointment. In a research study conducted by Family and Consumer Sciences educators, some 500 people were asked to tell about their losses and disappointments, rate the severity of them, what feelings they had, and what helped them to cope with or get over them.

Most of us recognize the obvious losses such as death, divorce, or loss of a favorite possession. But it's important to realize that the less obvious losses and disappointments can also be very significant.

Losses

- Health: physical and mental illnesses, injuries, chronic diseases
- Relationships other than divorce: siblings and family estrangement, unhappy marriages, problems with children, grandchildren, co-workers, friends
- Work/financial: jobs (loss of a job, downsizing, changing jobs), businesses, homes (moving, fires, etc.)
- Divorce
- Death
- Pregnancy issues (unfaithfulness, unexpected children, miscarriage, abortion, infertility)
- Losses from violence (rape, sexual assault)
- Loss of a dream or vision
- Loss of independence and self-esteem

The most shocking experiences of loss are those that alter the structure and functioning of our personal and family life. These kinds of losses and disappointments can have lasting impacts.

Much of the grieving we do comes from those losses that are easy to identify. The source of grief is obvious when someone dies, we experience a divorce, or we move away from our family and friends. The not-so-obvious losses and disappointments are more difficult to identify. An exciting event such as the birth of a baby may bring the loss of independence. A job promotion may bring the loss of valued clientele. There are many more examples like these.

Grieving Is an Individual Experience

A major loss for one person may be only a minor disappointment to another. The intensity of the loss or disappointment is often dependent on the significance of what was lost. The time span for recovery is also very individualized. For some, recovery may take only a few months, but for others experiencing the same or similar loss, it could take years.

Every person works out his or her own method of surviving or coping during times of loss. Some people turn to friends, while others like to be alone. Some seek out support groups and counselors, while others stay at home and cry or mourn. Physical activity, reading, working, talking, writing, and praying are all coping mechanisms that people use to deal with losses and disappointments.

Healing from a loss or disappointment is a process. All of us know that it takes time to get over something that overwhelms us. Time and a change in attitude are the most helpful things to help you recover. Primary support, such as family, friends, and church, along with time are also helpful. It is important to move on, talk with others, and let others help if you are to recover from your loss or disappointment. Give yourself time to grieve and to heal.

References

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