



EAP NEWS

LIVING WITH LOSS

Maggie Clarke-Lamarch
EAP Counsellor

When people come for counselling after they have suffered a loss, they are often surprised to be told that what they are experiencing is normal. I have had more than one person look at me after I describe reactions to loss and say, "so I'm not going crazy?"

Sometimes people think of grieving and loss happening in

response only to the death of a loved one.

In reality, losses can be small or large.

Losses can include loss of a job, loss of

role as a result of a major life change, loss of a sense of competence at work, or loss of a pet. The list is endless.

Different losses affect people in different ways. A loss which one person barely notices may send another person into a period of sadness and turmoil. Another person may find that they can cope with the loss of their job and their home, but find the loss of a pet to be the trigger for a greater episode of grieving. How we respond to loss has a good deal to do with previous experiences of loss, our personality, and what meaning we give to the loss. That's why it is always important

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to listen to what a loss means to the particular person who is experiencing it.

A good description I once heard of the grieving process is that it is like being on a train. At the beginning, the train is going fast, and it is just a matter of holding on and waiting for the train to slow down. When we first hear of a loss, our emotional reaction may be intense. At this point we should give ourselves permission to feel the feelings. It is also

important to take the time that is needed to grieve. People typically underestimate the length of the grieving process.

While it is difficult to say what a "normal" amount of time should be, a major loss such as the death of a loved one usually begins to resolve some time after the first anniversary of the loss. We need to be patient with ourselves and give ourselves the time it takes.

After a while, the train begins to slow down. It will even stop from time to time and give us breaks from the grieving process. Don't be worried if the feelings come back. That is also a normal part of the process.

Typical reactions to expect when you're grieving:

Feelings:

- sadness (often accompanied by crying)
- anger at self, others, deceased, God, the world
- guilt (over something that happened, or was neglected)
- anxiety (about what the world will be like without the person/job/pet/object)
- fatigue (it takes emotional energy to process a loss)
- shock (still present even if loss is expected)
- relief (if loss was expected, or if loss means something difficult has ended)
- numbness (a lack of feeling – the mind's way of protecting the person from a flood of feeling)

Physical sensations:

- hollowness in stomach (feeling 'sick')
- tightness in chest/throat, dry mouth
- over sensitivity to noise,
- depersonalization (the feeling that nothing seems real)
- breathlessness, muscle weakness, lack of energy

Thoughts and psychological symptoms:

- disbelief
- confusion (hard to concentrate, hard to keep thoughts straight, hard to make decisions, short-term memory loss)
- thinking you see or hear the person (if someone has died)
- difficulty sleeping, eating
- pulling away from friends and family

Taking Care of Yourself

If you have experienced a loss, it is important to take care of yourself:

- maintain healthy eating habits and lifestyle
- reach out for help – let people know when you need support
- try to keep a routine
- practice relaxation exercises
- consider seeking professional help

Grieving at Work

If you are grieving a personal loss you may choose to share this information with your employer and/or coworkers. This choice is a personal decision. If you do share, be prepared for a variety of reactions. Sometimes people will not even notice that you are sad. Other times people may underestimate what you are going through, or don't understand what the meaning of the loss is to you. Also, people will sometimes forget to ask, or may even avoid contact or

discussions with you because they do not know what to say. Rather than spending emotional energy being disappointed in these reactions, it is important that you seek out and accept offers of help from those people in your social network who are a support to you.

If the loss you have experienced is a loss that the whole workplace has experienced, there may be additional complications. Some people need to talk about their experiences and feelings very publicly. Others become more silent and withdrawn. Still others may use humour to deal with the situation. It is important to realize that people will have different and equally valid reactions to a loss. In the workplace, mutual tolerance and understanding is needed as people grieve in many different ways.



For more information call EAP:

**Eastern Ontario Toll Free
1-888-409-4499**

or

**FAMILY
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**EMPLOYEE
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PROGRAMS**

**Kingston area
549-5561**

or

1-800-668-9920

Across Canada and the U.S.

ON THE SIDE HOW DO I SURVIVE THE BACK TO SCHOOL CRUNCH?

Tim Utting, Credit Counsellor

September is often one of the most expensive months of the year. Not only are parents faced with the need for back to school clothes and school supplies for their kids but they are also trying to pay for various activities. Anyone's budget can be easily swamped by the flood of requests for money that coincide with the beginning of a new school year. The only way to prepare yourself for this is to spread these costs over the entire year. Most organizations now offer the option of leaving post dated cheques to pay for registration in installments to help spread out these costs, but that often is not enough. If you have several children or children participating in several different activities at once, you will need to plan for these expenses all year round.

Activities such as hockey, scouts and guides, gymnastics, figure skating and various other worthwhile activities for our children often have to be paid in the month of September. These types of expenses are a good example of the need for what we call a cash flow account. Because these expenses occur all at once there is a need to plan ahead to start saving for these expenses all year long.

If you open a separate account for these types of expenses then each month you can have your bank automatically transfer a set amount into this account so that when it comes time to pay for these activities you have enough money to do so. The same principle can be applied to saving for things like car repairs, Christmas shopping or even a vacation.

