

Northern Health Palliative Care

Normal Grief and Loss



Hot Tip
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Grief is a normal process everyone experiences and expresses differently. This can include the loss of a loved one and also the loss the dying person is experiencing. There are two styles of grieving, intuitive and instrumental; most people are a mixture of both to varying degrees and move around on the continuum.

Intuitive Grief

- Experiences strong affective reactions (waves of powerful emotions)
- Facial expression mirrors inner feelings
- Adaptation involves expression and exploration of feelings-talking, art
- Drawn to more traditionally based grief support groups that involve exploration of feeling and ways of coping

Instrumental Grief

- Experience and expression of grief is primarily cognitive or physical (inward quiet process with less expression of emotion)
- Adaptation generally involves thinking and doing (attending to the many tasks that follow a death or an unrelated activity such as cleaning or doing repairs)
- May benefit from groups that focus on educational topics (how to be a single parent, managing finances)

When helping, instead of using words like ‘How did you feel?’, a better question may be ‘how did you respond or react?’, as this validates both grieving styles. It is helpful for care professionals to recognize the differing styles and reassure the grieving patient that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Each person must find the expression(s) of grief that work best for them.

More information on the NHPC Program and registration forms can be found at www.northernhealth.ca or contact your local Palliative Care Nurse Consultant.

References:

Yalom, V. (Reporter). (2010). *Kenneth Doka on Grief Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Interview). Retrieved Feb 2016 from <https://www.psychotherapy.net/interview/grief-counseling-doka>