



# Psychotherapy and Counselling



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## **Sadness, grief and loss.**

As with anger and fear – sadness too is a core emotion which has restorative and calming properties of its own. The action of crying releases chemicals that soothe and clarify our thinking. Releasing sadness freely in a supportive safe environment also has enormous physical benefits to our overall health.

In our busy, often pressured lives, we may find great difficulty in finding a space that will allow us to express sadness openly and allow this sadness to be met by acceptance rather than judgements. Very often people can become anxious that if they start crying they may never be able to stop - a perception that, in falling apart, the grief may then become uncontained and overwhelm or contaminate all aspects of their life. They may fear they will never then be able to regain control and composure. Often it is the falling apart and losing control that people fear most in case it cannot be managed around the everyday situations they face.

Very often in western culture, after a death, mourners become admired and made role models for behaving 'with dignity' and 'stoic resolve', when carrying on with their normal duties. In this way shame is inferred for behaving otherwise. There is often the grateful expectation that sadness generally be stifled sufficiently so as not to trigger other people into sad feelings. Sometimes people stifle sadness to protect other people they care about as they may see it.

People move through grief processes in uniquely individual ways and there is no wrong or right way. In fact there are no rules. Some people find it harder to cope than others without rules and, for some, sadness can be felt to be so overwhelmingly unsafe in a life that sees crying as weakness and showing vulnerability as personal failure, that becoming angry instead feels safer. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the way in which unexpressed sadness prevents the person being present, anchored and aware in the moment. They may seem 'far away' as if in another world, preoccupied by past reflections and easily intimidated by the future.

Grief and bereavement have very real physical components and the full healthy expression of grief has involuntary vocal sounds. When grief is worked through in all its related stages, it is often accompanied by a need to naturally review personal values and guiding principles. The importance we associate with objects, memorabilia and people in our lives becomes challenged, adjusted or simply confirmed. In this way it can be renewing and transformative. Beginnings can start from endings. As we move through life's cycle, loss associated with letting go of aspects of that life, runs its own cycles. 'Blocked grief' is a term used whenever a person becomes denied of movement. Sometimes this can be the cause of some people's depression. If we acknowledge a loss fully, life can take on new meaning and gain a new momentum and rhythm.

If we expect ourselves to always be in control, irrespective of the realities and uncertainty life often can

present, we may lose the ability to recognise how the related sadness feels in our body and ignore the important messages it is sending us. In trying to be superhuman, we may lose our humanity towards others – and ourselves and lose the capacity for emotional intimacy with those that matter. In our strive to ‘function’, it may not give us breathing space to get in touch with vulnerability enough to ask for help, reach deeper levels of trust letting those we trust in to help us in comforting ourselves.

We might feel others have more of a right to feel sadness and loss than ourselves. Yet nobody has the monopoly on this important emotion. It means different things to different people in different lives. We may count our blessings but without being in touch with our own capacity to feel sad, we cannot really imagine what another’s loss might be really feel like. We can be isolated in our loss in more ways than we thought.

***Wheel of stages of grief:***

Shock and disbelief

Despair

Denial

Anger

Anguish

Depressed

Numbness

Realisation

Acceptance

Individuals move through this at their own pace and, sometimes backward and forth and in different orders. This is only a guiding example.

I have attempted to discuss a wide range of sadness related issues in the hope readers may be able to recognise some or one aspect for their own interest. Grief and bereavement are natural normal processes and whereas many people would not seek therapy or counselling for help, trusting their own good instincts, other people may suffer more general sadness related problems and difficulties which are not so progressively resolvable. Also some actively grieving clients I have supported often simply felt they needed a safe space to release their sorrow with some assurance and confirmation that things will be work out in the end.

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