

# Feeling states of GRIEF AND LOSS

*Active grieving* is a disorderly process that can toss the person stricken with grief from one state of feeling to another. Our goal is to make some sense of what is happening to the grieving person. There are (4) primary feelings states associated with active grieving that we will look at: *depression, guilt, anger and fear*. These are the natural feeling states that result from *a lost attachment*.

**Depression.** In the context of this course depression is *the feeling state that opens us to painful questions about our broken dreams and our ability to cope*. Depression in this sense is emotional pain that motivates us to look for new meaning and to find new dreams. It forces us to answer questions like, “Can I make it now?” “What’s the point?” “What good is it?” “What good am I?” We are forced to ask these questions because the dreams we lost *were* our answers to these questions. Losses press us into answering these questions all over again in the face of our despair.

List your questions asked due to loss:	Describe the feelings related to these questions:
--	---

Example: “Can I go on?”

Helplessness, hopelessness.

1.

2.

3.

4.

The answers we come up with help us to create a new sense of ourselves, and signal that the broken pieces of our lives are beginning to fit together again.

Looking for the courage and strength to answer the hard questions is done best in relationship with a supportive person. That person could be referred to as “*an attachment figure*.” The characteristics of an attachment relationship are (1) believing that your “care giver” (the attachment figure) will be there for you—and that when you are near that person you feel secure and able to go on, (2) security gained from an attachment bond is enough to enable you to engage with the issues facing you, (3) anxiety is reduced by closeness to your care giver, (4) the threat of losing your care giver produces anxiety and/or anger, and (5) the loss of the care giver brings deep grief. (To better relate to this idea try “personifying” your addiction and describe your former attachment relationship to that addiction.)

<b>Discussion point:</b> Share your answers to the questions you’ve had as a result of a loss.
--

1.

2.

3.

4.

# Feeling states of GRIEF AND LOSS

**Anger.** Anger is another primary feeling state of grief. It relates to the question “*Why?*” but more specifically “*Why me? It’s not fair!*” Loss can remind us that the world is not always controllable or fair and that we are at risk of experiencing violations at unpredictable times. Anger is important in that it energizes us to fight to meet or protect our rightful needs and to have appropriate boundaries. But most of us have at many points along the way received the message “Anger is not okay to show.” The anger we feel during periods of grief is not usually very subtle. It is more volcanic, and can be disturbing to those around us. And angry expressions can be further disturbing to those around us when anger is out of the norm for us. In times of grief we can forget the “rules” we usually go by and show strong anger.

Many of us are from dysfunctional homes where normal anger was not allowed. We are used to either suppressing or hiding our anger, or being too aggressive in our anger. We can also switch back and forth between the two extremes. Anger is one of the reasons we don’t have permission to grieve from those around us.

In dysfunctional homes the old rules were *don’t feel your feelings, don’t talk about feelings, and don’t trust anyone with your feelings* (adapted from Claudia Black, 1982). We may need some help to accurately recognize our “normal” anger, especially when the anger takes a subtle form. We usually think that if we are not shouting and throwing things, we are not angry. But we need to be careful not to stereotype anger. Anger can show up in the way we say things, even if the words themselves are not obviously angry words. Angry can seep through in our body language, in our voice tone and volume, or in passive ways (such as the things we do or don’t do). It may be necessary to spend several days taking a personal inventory of anger once we have stopped over-simplifying anger, to be able to see anger in all its forms.

At this point it may be helpful to have a functional definition of anger: Anger is “*the emotion of self-preservation.... Anger is defined as the feeling that energizes us to preserve (1) our sense of personal worth, (2) our essential needs, and (3) basic convictions.*” (*The Anger Workbook*, Minirth)

Take time now to share past times when you experienced a strong motivation to stand up for yourself. Describe the feelings associated with those times when you felt your dignity was being stepped on (*personal worth*), or when your wants were not regarded as important by someone (*needs*), or when you could not make choices for yourself (*convictions*).

Write down these thoughts and feelings to further make them clear:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Feeling states of GRIEF AND LOSS

**Fear.** *Fear is the feeling state that informs us we are not really safe; loss makes this terrible fact terribly real.* When we loss someone or something important it can evoke painful feelings. As human beings we fear the pain of loss. It is something we learned about long ago as children. Our personalities and characters have been affected, even shaped, by realities such as this. We learned to build walls in our lives against this kind of pain. This is the central reason we have emotional defense systems. We all need defenses. The problem comes in when we have such a long history of surviving pain that our survival defense system gets over-developed. It is possible, even likely, that our defenses exceed what they are meant for (internal and external safety), and become a barrier to living life freely, spontaneously. It is like trying to dance gracefully while wearing a heavy suit of armor. It is hard to get close to anyone for all the protective gear.

The self evolves in levels, or layers. There is the *natural* self that we were born to be. For some of us our nature is to be caring and sensitive. For others of us it is to be spontaneous and outgoing. Some people are quite. Some people are naturally laid back; others have got to be on the go. To some degree it is how we were born. But many of us had painful experiences that taught us it is not safe to be ourselves. We get hurt and believe there is a survival lesson in the pain, and usually there is. Sometimes the lessons are too hard to bear (traumatic) and the pain forces us to defend. It is this kind of pain that brings the *hurt* self into existence. When there are no answers the *hurt* self emerges and gives an answer. It is a painful answer, something like “You hurt because you are unlovable.” “You are bad, no good, you are unworthy—that’s why.” Our *natural* self has been forced out of Eden to face a world of pain alone. It is this overwhelming situation that forces another self to emerge. It is the *adapted* self, the part of our personalities that comes in to save the *hurt* child from overwhelming pain. The *adapted* child is a survival role or combination of roles that gets us through life. There is a mission that the *adapted* self learns to commit to. It is like a life-and-death mission. If the mission fails we are emotionally dumped back into the world of the *hurt* child, which is a crisis for the *adapted* child. These are layers that long ago began covering over the *natural* self in the name of surviving life.

Grief and loss comes along and threatens to tear down this whole system of defense. The idea of serious losses can be very scary. We need to learn about loss from a different perspective, a perspective of hope. We need someone to show up in our times of need. We are back to the need for an attachment figure that we can count on. In recovery there is a discovery process that reveals the *adult within* the can help with that need. We may not trust that adult at first. We may have the tendency to say, “You aren’t who I need! Go away!” Recovery is about building trust in reliable “others” and, much to our surprise, there *is* a reliable other within. Grieve is the path to that discovery.

Describe the strengths of your adult self that help you to manage painful feelings and to grow:

---

---

---

---

---

# Feeling states of GRIEF AND LOSS

**Guilt.** *This is the feeling state of personal responsibility as related to questions of blame.* “Who caused this?” “Who is responsible?” And worse yet “*It’s my fault.*” Quoting Kearney (p 198), “The guilt feelings are there because the griever is working out a new definition of causality and responsibility in the light of a profound loss.” Watching someone work through guilt feelings is difficult. We are tempted to rescue them by saying “Don’t feel guilty, it wasn’t your fault.” But it doesn’t work. People have to come to their own answers. True freedom and healing can only come when a person finds a new way of making a meaningful peace with the loss. This peace can seem impossible to find at first, especially if there is confusion between true (or healthy) guilt and false guilt.

True guilt helps us to take full responsibility for our actions, to learn constructive lessons from our lives and helps us to make healthier choices in the future—choices that better reflect our truest self. False guilt is crippling and is an attack upon our selves from within, an attack that can paralyze us and keep us trapped in dysfunctional grief. Toxic guilt makes us feel out-of-control emotionally and causes us to settle for black and white answers. We want to believe our false or distorted answers because then we can then say “At least I have an answer,” when all we really have is a false sense of control. True guilt (or functional guilt) helps us find real answers that will enable us to pass through grief to an increased maturity and a future that is not dependent upon a denial of the past. Making peace like this highlights the crucial importance of having an attachment bond with a caring person going through this with us.

Guilt presses us out of the *adapted* child into the old world of the *hurt* child. Neither the *hurt* nor the *adapted* child hold the answers we need to guilt. Truly answering this question takes us to the *natural* child. If we stop short of that we are still not yet done with *transition* and *active* grieving. Painful losses force us to examine these inward selves and to re-evaluate their roles in our adult life. This may be a new exercise for many. Below is space to write notes to clarify the “selves” inside you:

The **true** me (the *natural* child), at birth-to-toddler: (example) “*By nature I am a sensitive person.*”

---

The **hurt** me: *Describe how the natural child was affected by wounding(s)...*

---

The **adapted** me: *What “roles” helped you survive?*

---

The **grieving** me: *What is grief causing you to look at within yourself?*

---

The **truest** me: *Rediscovering me (the healthy natural adult me):*

---