

Employee Assistance Program

It's Hard to Say Goodbye

Hallmark began producing sympathy cards in 1920, and this category of greeting cards accounts for six percent of all the cards people send every day. According to the company's research, "people want to reach out to friends, family and acquaintances who are experiencing bereavement, but often feel they don't know what to say."

It is hard to know what to say when someone is grieving the loss of a family member, friend, colleague, or pet. Loss can trigger many conflicting emotions, and all of us will experience grief during our lifetimes. One way to cope better with these emotions, as well as support others, is by gaining a better understanding of the grief and loss process.

According to Mental Health America, "mourning is the natural process you go through to accept a major loss... Mourning is personal and may last months or years." While the grieving process differs for each individual, most people experience some mixture of anger, confusion, denial, despair, guilt, shock, and sadness.

If you experience some or all of these emotions, it's important to be patient with yourself and honor the grieving process. As Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt, a grief counselor with the Center for Loss and Life Transition, writes "...some people think you should be able to control or subdue your feelings of sadness. Nothing could be further from the truth. Your sadness is a symptom of your wound. Just as physical wounds require attention, so do emotional wounds."

Here are some suggestions to help you address those "wounds":

- **Find a listening post.** Good listeners don't tell you to get over it, give advice, or tell you how to fix it. You may find good listeners through a grief support group, sympathetic colleagues, or your EAP. (Source: www.aarp.org)
- **Write a list of things you love to do.** During grief, people sometimes feel scattered and forget about the activities that bring them joy. (www.learnpsychology.org)
- **Reach out and help others dealing with the loss.** Helping others has the added benefit of making you feel better as well. Sharing stories of the deceased and celebrating their lives can help everyone cope. (www.apa.org)

In addition, one of the best ways to cope during periods of grief is taking the very best care of yourself that you can by eating healthy, sleeping well, and exercising regularly. This combination of activities may make it a little easier to say goodbye. Check with your EAP about additional resources for understanding and managing grief.



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