

*Processing grief and
related emotions*

Although grief can seem overwhelming, when it is properly understood and assessed and treated it can be successfully managed and resolved. This intervention guide with the related Grief Spectrum-1 and Interpretation Guide provide a structure for doing so.

Step 1: Determine if grief exists and exactly what is being grieved. This may or may not be a complicated process. Since grief is a repressible emotion, there may be “accumulated” grief in addition to whatever the more obvious or recent grief stimulus is. Because it is critically important to resolve secondary emotions related to grief (anger, anxiety, confusion, depression and guilt), it is very important to define the grief event(s) clearly.

Step 2: For each identifiable grief event, identify the secondary emotions related to it. As stated above, these emotions include anger, anxiety, confusion, depression and guilt.

Step 3: With a better understanding of what the “emotional stakes” are, this is the time to check with client/patients to make sure they are ready to take on the emotional task of processing and resolving their grief.

Step 4: This is the time to process and strip away the secondary emotions related to grief.

Anger: We refer to the Dashometrics Stored Anger Worksheet for processing anger related to identified grief events.

Anxiety: The first step with secondary anxiety is to clarify what stimulates the anxiety associated with the grief event. Once the anxiety stimulus is established (or multiple stimuli) there are four stimulus management strategies to use: avoidance, de-sensitization, transformation and reinterpretation. For further discussion of these strategies please refer to Dashometric’s “Managing the Stimulus”

Confusion: Most of the confusion related to a grief event involves issues of “what happens now”, “why did this happen” or “what don’t I know that I want to know about the person I am grieving?” These are not neurological forms of confusion. Some of these questions will be answerable by getting information. Therapeutic intervention will involve helping client/patients decide what information is worth pursuing, and then helping them let go of the need to know the unknowable.

Depression: Oftentimes, depression that co-occurs with grief will naturally resolve on its own. It is important to determine if there are circumstances related to the loss that will continue to stimulate depression. If there are, we refer to Dashometrics Depression Intervention Guide for appropriate intervention.

Guilt: We refer to Dashometrics Guilt Resolution Worksheet for processing guilt related to identified grief events.

Step 5: The final step is to process the residual “purified” grief. First, when grief is acknowledged and “experienced” it tends to begin a spontaneous resolution process. Grief is productively released through crying. Yet this experience can be overwhelming. For this reason, we encourage client/patients to use social supports for their grief release experiences. This means sharing grief with compassionate, supportive “witnesses” – be they individuals or groups. It may also be desirable to help client/patient’s “pendulate” their grief. This means they will allow them to experience grief in smaller bits and then intentionally distance themselves from their grieving emotions.