

# Self-help groups Neighbor to Neighbor

## Session 1—Loss: You can help yourself and others

**To get ready**  
Obtain the following:

1. Session 1 leader guide/discussion materials\* (one per group member)
2. *Encouraging a friend to seek professional help* (PM 1214, optional, one per family; available from your county extension office or ISU Extension Distribution Center, 515-294-5247)

This session will

1. help people understand feelings and behaviors associated with personal loss
2. help people reach out to others who are experiencing loss

Activities	Materials	Time
• Greetings and settling in		10 minutes
• Introduction	<i>Understanding loss</i> (1A)	10 minutes
	Leader reads text out loud while group follows along, p. 2–3.	
• Individual activity	<i>Understanding loss behavior</i> (1B)	5 minutes
• Group discussion of activity 1B		15 minutes
• Individual activity	<i>Understanding loss: You can help</i> (1C)	5 minutes
	Leader reads introduction; individuals complete <i>Helping behaviors</i> checklist.	
• Group discussion		20 minutes
	Group discusses <i>Helping behaviors</i> checklist (round-robin response).	
• Distribute to group (optional, for home reading)	<i>Encouraging a friend to seek professional help</i> (PM 1214)	2 minutes
• Stretch time and refreshments		5 minutes
• Structured sharing time		60 minutes
	Allow all group members a chance to speak by using a kitchen timer. Each person in turn sets the timer for approximately 5–10 minutes depending on the size of the group. Be flexible on those occasions when someone may need to take more than his or her share of the time.	

Respond: How can farm families use strengths to deal with present problems?

Approximate total = 2 hours, 12 minutes

### Additional resources

Invite a mental health provider to meet with your group. Your group organizer has contacted at least two counselors who have agreed to be resources for your group. Suggested topic: what to expect in a counseling session, different options for counseling, cost, and choosing a counselor.

\* Also available on the World Wide Web:  
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs>

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## Understanding loss

## Activity 1A

Adjustment to significant loss takes time and hard emotional work. A person experiencing great loss will exhibit changes in behavior. Understanding the stages of loss and behavior typical of each stage can be comforting to a person caught in the midst of undesired change. Understanding the loss cycle helps people know that what they are feeling and going through is normal under the circumstances. Knowing more about typical loss experiences may provide the reassurance and confidence to move ahead with life.

Understanding loss can benefit those who want to help others too. If a relative, neighbor, or friend is experiencing great loss, knowing what is normal helps you know when you can help and when it may be best to encourage the person to get help from a trained counselor.

In the first stage of loss, the person may deny that the loss is occurring or may go into shock and be nearly unable to function. A person in **denial** wants to avoid thinking about or dealing with the situation, and a person in **shock** may feel confusion and may have trouble doing normally easy tasks.

Later, after the person realizes what is happening and is thinking more clearly, he or she is likely to feel **anger** and look for someone to blame. It is both normal and healthy for a person to feel angry when losing something or someone valuable. In dealing with a person at this stage it is helpful to let him or her express angry feelings. At the same time, if the anger goes too far, you may need to remind the person that acting destructively is not OK.

Often **depression** sets in as anger begins to lessen. As with anger, depression is normal during a period of loss. The person generally lacks energy and retreats from activities and people. There can be overwhelming feelings of sadness along with crying or the person may be too numb to feel much of anything. At this point, the person probably blames himself or herself for the situation.

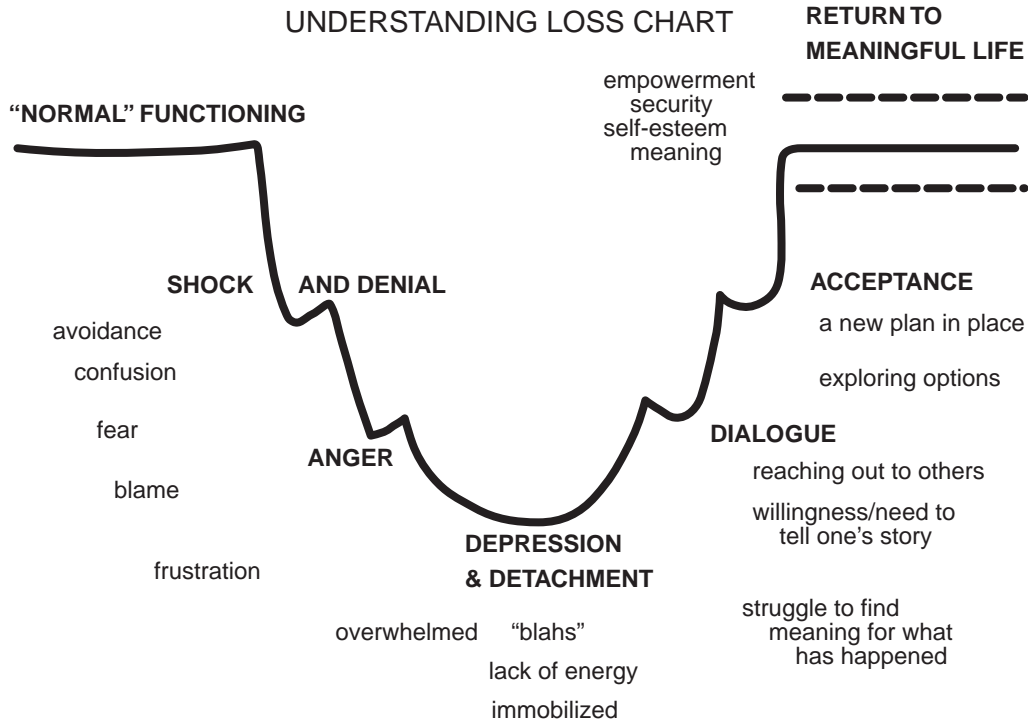
With time, understanding, and care from others, depression begins to become less intense and the person begins to reach out to others to talk and listen. This is the beginning of a return to a meaningful life. It is especially important to have understanding and realistic family and friends to talk to.

After the person begins this **dialogue**, he or she begins to **accept** the situation and make plans for the future. Even at this stage he or she may have periods of anger and depression, but they don't last as long and they are less and less severe.

Each person going through the loss experience has his or her own time table. No two people react exactly the same at each stage. Stages may overlap or recur; a person doesn't forget or "get over" the loss. However, knowing that all the stages are normal helps us to know that we can move through the difficult time and return to a meaningful life.

**Understanding loss**

**Activity 1A, continued**



**Related feelings associated with loss**

Since each person is different, no two people will experience loss in exactly the same way. At the shock and denial stage some people may want to avoid thinking about the problem or even recognizing that there is a problem. One type of shock behavior is confusion and inability to make decisions. At the anger stage many people feel like blaming others and tend to feel easily irritated, frustrated, or fearful.

Depression may range from a case of the “blahs” or feeling blue all the time to feeling overwhelmed or immobilized. While many depressed people lack energy, some severely depressed people are agitated and can’t seem to slow down to a normal pace.

During dialogue people begin to reach out to others and need to have others listen as they talk about what happened. Through the talking, people struggle to find meaning for what happened. As dialogue takes place people gradually accept what happened and begin to make plans for the future.

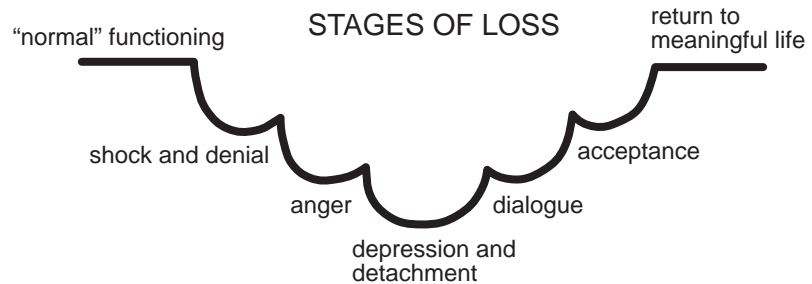
The dotted lines on the right side of the diagram show that families probably won’t end up at the same place they started before the loss or crisis began. If they have been unable to move through all the stages they may not end up as well off as before the experience. However, if people can accept their feelings, talk them out, and accept help from others, they may end up stronger than they were before the difficulty or loss occurred.

They may have a new sense of self-esteem, security, and empowerment—knowing they can meet challenges and problems in the future.

## Understanding loss behavior

## Activity 1B

A person experiencing significant loss likely will exhibit changes in behavior. The following examples of behavior might be seen in a person or family suffering great loss. On the line in front of each behavior, indicate the loss stage(s) in which you feel this behavior “fits.”



- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. A usually hard-working, energetic farmer lays on the couch for several days, staring into space.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. A farm woman says to her husband, “Why don’t we just give up and get out? That’s what the government wants. We can’t win. We’re beating our heads against the wall.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. An intelligent farm couple cannot concentrate and figure out how to fill out loan forms.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. A farm couple, relying on financial analysis of their operation, decides the woman will seek a job in town and they will consider selling some acreage.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. A farm woman blames her husband for the family’s lack of money. Her husband yells at the kids when they request money for recreation or clothes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The owner of a main street business in a rural community insists the farm problems are “fiction.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. A regular church-going farm family stops attending services.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. A farm couple on the verge of bankruptcy approaches a trusted family member and says, “We’ve just got to talk to someone about this.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. A farm family’s bank accounts are frozen and there is no food in the house. The husband does not want his wife to apply for food stamps.

## Understanding loss: You can help

## Activity 1C

If someone you know is experiencing loss, you can help. Many of us sell ourselves short as helpers. We convince ourselves that we are inadequate and that the helping process is complicated and mysterious.

Not so. Most of us have learned a great deal about helping just by living for a number of years, being in relationships with others, owning up to our own quirks, and surviving any number of changes.

Which of the following helping behaviors are easiest for you to act out? Most difficult? (Indicate by using E = easy, D = difficult)

### Helping behaviors checklist

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Place yourself in the other person's shoes and try to feel what he or she is feeling.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Send an "I care" message.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Do a lot of listening.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Deal with reality straight-on. Don't pretend everything is all right when it isn't.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Discourage blaming of self or others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Allow feelings to be expressed, even anger and tears. Help the person deal with anger in constructive ways.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Always express hope for the future and belief that the person will summon what strength is necessary to see the situation through.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Encourage problem-solving behaviors. What needs to be done? What are the alternatives?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Encourage getting help. This may mean going with someone to the food stamp office, mental health center, or financial consultant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Be patient. Adjustment to significant loss takes time and requires hard emotional work. It can be done, but it will take time.

### For discussion

Think of a time when you used one of the above behaviors to help someone going through a rough time. Share it with the group.