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Coming to terms with sight loss

Being diagnosed with a visual impairment has a major impact on your life. Every person's reaction will vary to a certain degree but you may find yourself experiencing feelings of denial, anger and fear. You may be asking yourself 'why me?' What's important to understand is that all of these feelings are normal. Losing sight is similar to a bereavement and the emotions you are feeling are all part of the process, a period of adjustment, that will eventually lead you to adapting to the changes in your life due to your vision loss.

SHOCK AND DISBELIEF

Whether your vision loss comes suddenly or a diagnosis of deteriorating sight loss is given, the immediate reaction is one of shock and disbelief. You may not believe it and look for second and third opinions. You may find yourself carrying on as normal - as if there has been no significant change in your life.

This is the first stage of the process. It is your mind's way of 'buying time' to allow you to become used to the impact the diagnosis has on your life.

ANGER AND QUESTIONING

Anger is another normal response. You may find yourself feeling angry and irritable with those around you and with medical providers or institutions. If your cause of vision loss was caused by an accident or the ineffective or inadequate medical treatment then you have a legitimate target for your anger. When this is the case, seeking justice can help you feel you are once again in control. However, sometimes there is no obvious target for the anger. You may ask yourself, 'why has this happened to me?'

You find yourself searching for explanations even though they won't make any difference to your situation.

Using this anger to focus your energy on exploring ways of changing the way you view this experience is necessary in order to feel you can move on.

Over time you will find ways to deal with your sight loss, focus on the positives and find ways of moving forward.

FEELING VULNERABLE, ANXIOUS AND HELPLESS

Once you begin to come to terms with what lies beyond your power of changing you may begin to feel vulnerable, anxious and helpless. This can be scary. You may find yourself worrying about income, becoming dependent on others and feel embarrassed and anxious when around other people. You may feel a loss of confidence and begin to shy away from socialising with others.

However, finding new ways of living with sight loss and gaining new skills in the process can help you to regain confidence. But, if you find the anxiety and panic overwhelming it is important to seek help from your GP or a counsellor.

SADNESS AND GRIEF

It is completely normal to grieve for a sense that you are now losing or have lost. It is a natural process and takes time. It's okay to cry. Allowing yourself space will strengthen your ability to cope.

If the sadness goes on for too long it can tip over into depression. If these feelings are stopping you from getting on with life or you have thoughts of harming yourself seek help from your GP or counsellor.

LOSS AND RENEWAL OF IDENTITY

Our identity is so often tied into the things we do. When one experiences loss of sight you may lose sense of who you are. Perhaps you were the main breadwinner, the aspiring artist or practical mechanic. With the right kinds of adjustments these roles will not be lost to you. On the positive side, it may be an opportunity to find a new career or interest. You may not feel it, but when you are ready for them new opportunities may arise that you may otherwise never have been exposed to.

Adjusting to your new sense of self is a gradual process and each person's journey to reaching that point is different. But you will get to a stage when you begin to feel better and able to move on.

LEARNING AND ACCEPTANCE

As you move through your sight loss journey you will find yourself learning about your visual impairment and the challenges it brings.

You will find yourself learning new ways of navigating this strange new world and learning from others is a big part of this journey.

Finding out about what support, aids and adaptations there are to help you is another step towards acceptance. Talking to others about what has benefitted them is part of the learning experience.

As you begin to learn about your situation you may begin to find the positives in this seemingly negative situation.

MOVING ON

All of these emotions are normal and part of the process. Everyone's journey is different. Different people will find different ways of adapting, but it is possible to overcome. Once acceptance is reached it will make it easier to find ways of adopting a positive aspect towards life with sight loss which will help to make you stronger.

If you, or anyone you know, is experiencing difficulties with sight loss The Partially Sighted Society are here to help.

- Enhanced Low Vision Assessments to help you make the best use of your remaining vision**
- Professional sight test facility**
- Support groups and activity groups**
- Large range of aids and equipment**
- Telephone help and advice**
- Visual Awareness Training for professionals and carers**
- Printers of heavily lined stationery**