

9075 - Dealing with Grief

What is Grief?

Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. The more significant the loss, the more intense the grief. However, even subtle losses can lead to grief.

Examples of losses:

- Divorce or relationship breakup
- Loss of health
- Losing a job
- Loss of financial stability
- A miscarriage
- Retirement
- Death of a pet
- Loss of a cherished dream
- A loved one's serious illness
- Loss of a friendship
- Loss of safety after a trauma
- Selling the family home

Everyone grieves differently

Grieving is a personal and highly individual experience. Healing happens gradually; it can't be forced or hurried—and **there is no "normal" timetable for grieving**. It's important to be patient with yourself and allow the process to naturally unfold.

5 Stages of Grief

- **Denial:** "This can't be happening to me."
- **Anger:** "Why is this happening? Who is to blame?"
- **Bargaining:** "Make this not happen, and in return I will _____."
- **Depression:** "I'm too sad to do anything."
- **Acceptance:** "I'm at peace with what happened."

Just a guideline!

Even the psychiatrist who founded these stages (Kübler-Ross) said: "They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but **there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss**. Our grieving is as individual as our lives."

Contrary to popular belief, **you do not have to go through each stage in order to heal**. Some do not go through any stage, while others may go through the stages but most likely won't experience them in a neat, sequential order.

Think of grief as a roller coaster, not a series of stages

Grief has many highs and lows where you will feel some moments of pleasant thoughts. The stages are responses many people may have but it should not be how we "measure" grief.

Common symptoms

- **Shock and disbelief:** You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth.
- **Sadness:** This is the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness or cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.
- **Guilt:** You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more you could have done.
- **Anger:** If you lost a loved one, you may be angry with yourself, God, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you.
- **Fear:** You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.
- **Physical symptoms:** Grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

Tips to cope with grief and loss

1. *Get support.* #1 most important thing is support from others. Even if you're not comfortable talking about your feelings, it is especially important that you express them during this time. Accept the support and do not grieve alone.
 - **turn to family and friends:** lean on those who care for you, even if you take pride in being strong and self sufficient! Often people want to help but do not know how, so tell them what you need.
 - **draw comfort from your faith:** If you're questioning your faith in the wake of loss, talk to a pastor or others in your religious community. Spiritual activities such as praying, meditating or going to church can offer solace.
 - **join a support group:** Contact local hospitals or counselling centers to share your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses.
 - **talk to a therapist or grief counselor:** See below of when you should speak to a professional. If you also just feel like your grief is too much to bear, call a mental health professional with experience in grief counselling.
2. *Take care of yourself:*
 - Face your feelings: in order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Unresolved grief or avoidance can lead to complications like depression, anxiety, substance abuse, health problems
 - Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way: write in a journal, write a letter to say things you never got to say, make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life
 - Look after your physical health: The mind and body are connected. When you feel better physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Get enough sleep, eat right, and exercise.
 - Don't let anyone tell you how to feel and don't tell yourself how to feel either: No one can tell you when to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you want to feel without embarrassment or judgment.
 - Plan ahead for grief triggers: Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones and reawaken memories and triggers. If you're sharing a holiday with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on ways you want to honour the person you loved.

Grief vs. Depression

The difference between grief and depression isn't always easy as there are many similar symptoms. Grief is like a roller coaster with a mix of good and bad days. Depression on the other hand, has constant feelings of emptiness and despair.

Other symptoms that suggest depression, not just grief:

- Intense, pervasive sense of guilt
- Thoughts of suicide or a preoccupation with dying
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Slow speech and body movements
- Inability to function at work, home, and/or school
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there

Seek professional help for grief when:

- Feel like life isn't worth living
- Wish you had died with your loved one
- Blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it
- Feel numb and disconnected from others for more than a few weeks
- Are having difficulty trusting others since your loss
- Are unable to perform your normal daily activities

More resources for specific types of grief:

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief-loss/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm>

Source: www.helpguide.org/