

Understanding Grief and Loss

Grief & Loss



Any loss can cause grief, including the loss of a relationship, your health, your job, or a cherished dream. Learn how to better cope with what you are feeling and process your emotions in ways that allow you to heal.

*Grief **can affect** our body, mind, emotions, and spirit. **People** might notice or show grief in several ways: Physical reactions: These might be things like changes in appetite or sleep, an upset stomach, tight chest, crying, tense muscles, trouble relaxing, low energy, restlessness, or trouble concentrating.*

Grief is normal and healthy, and grieving people should honor these feelings of loss. They need loved ones to listen to them when they want to talk about their loss and to hold them when they feel overcome by emotions. Most importantly, the bereaved need patience from others. Although grief has stages, it does not have a specific timeline.

The terms “grief,” “mourning,” and “bereavement” have slightly different meanings:

- **Grief** is a person’s emotional response to the experience of loss.
- **Mourning** is the process of adapting to life after a loss. It is influenced by each person’s society, culture, and religion.
- **Bereavement** is the state of having experienced a loss.

Common grief reactions

Reactions to loss are called grief reactions. They vary widely from person to person and within the same person over time. Common grief reactions include difficult feelings, thoughts, physical sensations, and behaviors.

- **Feelings.** People who have experienced loss may have a range of feelings. This could include shock, numbness, sadness, denial, despair, anxiety, anger, guilt, loneliness, depression, helplessness, relief, and yearning. A grieving person may start crying after hearing a song or comment that makes them think of the person who died. On the other hand, that person may not know what triggered his or her crying.
- **Thoughts.** Common thought patterns include disbelief, confusion, difficulty concentrating, preoccupation, and hallucinations.
- **Physical sensations.** Grief can cause physical sensations. These include tightness or heaviness in the chest or throat, nausea or an upset stomach, dizziness, headaches, physical numbness, muscle weakness or tension, and fatigue. It may also make you vulnerable to illness.
- **Behaviors.** A grieving person may struggle to fall asleep or stay asleep. He or she may also lose energy for enjoyable activities. The person may lose interest in eating or being social. A grieving person may also become more irritable or aggressive. Other common behaviors include restlessness and excessive activity.

What to Do if You Are Grieving

Many people can feel rudderless during the grieving process, not only because they are experiencing new and challenging emotions, but because there is no rulebook for how to act or feel. Although there is no one way to feel, there are resources to help people move forward.

1 SUPPORT

- Instead of trying to be alone, seek out support from friends and family. If you feel a tendency toward social isolation, identify one or two people you feel comfortable around even when you are not feeling well, and try to spend time with them.
- Seek support from a grief counselor or therapist. Professionals can help you understand what you are experiencing and give advice on coping with your feelings.
- Look for support groups for people going through similar events. Camaraderie is integral to validating your own experience instead of feeling alone in it.

2 SELF CARE

- Prioritize eating and sleeping. Sometimes grief is so consuming that we forget the importance of these most basic acts.
- Make time for physical exercise. Whatever your fitness level, try to get outdoors and spend time in nature. Exercise releases endorphins and clears the mind. Nature has an incredible way of helping us feel centered and in touch with something larger than ourselves.
- It may seem silly at this time, but pamper your body. Schedule regular massages, hair treatments or pedicures. Not only is it important to remind yourself of what it feels like to be cared for and to feel good physically, but body treatment helps process emotions so they can be released through the body.

3 SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES

- Write a list of things you love to do. In periods of grief people often feel scattered and forget what activities bring them joy.
- Prioritize expressive activities; it can be therapeutic to create something new and beautiful at a time of loss.

Resources Used:

<https://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/grief-and-loss/understanding-grief-and-loss>

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

<https://www.learnpsychology.org/now/grief/>