



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 your grief will be.

There are many types of grief in addition to loss due to death.

HOW DO YOU COPE WITH GRIEF?

The grieving process

Grieving is a highly individual experience; there's no right or wrong way to grieve. There are no steps to grieving.

How you grieve depends on many factors, including

- Your personality and coping style
- Your life experience (how many people you know who have passed away, your beliefs of death/dying/the afterlife, etc.)
- How significant the loss was to you
- Your relationship with the person who is gone

Inevitably, the grieving process takes time and grief never completely goes away. Healing happens gradually; it can't be forced or hurried—and there is no “normal” timetable for grieving.

Whatever your grief experience, it's important to be patient with yourself and allow the process to naturally unfold.

Coping with grief and loss

- The pain of loss can feel overwhelming.
- You may experience all kinds of difficult and unexpected emotions, from shock or anger to disbelief, guilt, and profound sadness.
- The pain of grief can also disrupt your physical health, making it difficult to sleep, eat, or even think straight.
- These are normal reactions to significant loss.
- There is no right or wrong way to grieve, but there are healthy ways to cope with the pain of grief.

SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF

Just remember that almost anything that you experience while grieving is normal—including feeling like you can't cope, feeling like you're in a bad dream, or questioning your religious or spiritual beliefs.

Shock and disbelief – You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth.

Sadness – Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also 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).

Anger – Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. 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 – A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure.

Physical symptoms – We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Acknowledge your pain
2. Accept that grief can trigger many different and unexpected emotions
3. Understand that your grieving process will be unique to you
4. Seek out face-to-face support from people who care about you
5. Learn how taking care of yourself physically can support you emotionally
6. Understand the difference between grief and depression

Take care of yourself

Face your feelings. You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain.

Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way. Write about your loss in a journal. If you've lost a loved one, write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organization that was important to your loved one. Activities that allow you to say goodbye and express your emotions are important to get some closure while also maintaining continuous bonds with the person you've lost.

Look after your physical health. The mind and body are connected. When you feel healthy physically, you'll be better able to cope emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, resting, eating, and staying active/connected to nature. Using alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood will only do so artificially and temporarily.

Try to maintain your hobbies and interests. There's comfort in routine and getting back to the activities that bring you joy and connect you closer to others can help you come to terms with your loss and aid the grieving process.

Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either. Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.

Plan ahead for grief "triggers". Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. If you're sharing a holiday or lifecycle event with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on strategies to honor the person you loved.

Establish continuing bonds. Just because the person is no longer present in your life in the way they used to be (physically or cognitively), doesn't mean that your relationship with this person is over. As time goes on and you begin to grow with your grief, it can be helpful to find ways to continue your relationship with this person. Examples of continuing bonds are talking to the person as if they are present, writing them letters, continuing to celebrate important events (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.), having an object that makes you feel connected to the person, visiting important places, etc.

“But what is grief if not love persevering?”