

# GRIEF AND LOSS

## Supporting Yourself and Others

### What is Grief?

Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the sorrow, confusion, and emotional pain we feel when something important to us or someone we know or love deeply is taken away. The more significant the loss, the more intense our grief. Losing someone through death can be one of the most distressing events in our lives. Over 80% of college students report experiencing the death of at least one loved person - grandparent, parent, sibling, professor, or friend.

### Grief Has No Timeline

It is a common myth that people 'get over' grief. In reality, a part of us will always grieve the loss of our loved one. With time, our pain will diminish, but the sorrow we feel will always be a part of us. Grief lasts as long as it takes for us to accept the loss and adjust to living in a world without our loved one.

### Common Grief Responses

Everyone grieves in their own way. Some people are open and expressive with their grief, crying, and wanting to talk, while others are more private, may be reluctant to talk, and prefer to keep busy. How we grieve depends on the nature of the loss as well as our personality and coping style, life experiences, faith, and culture. Grief is individual and personal, and it's important to respect each other's ways of grieving, even if we don't understand them.

After a death, we can experience a range of intense feelings that come and go in 'waves.' We may feel deeply sad or be numb. We might experience irritability or anger at the circumstances of the loss, at the upset to our belief in fairness or the expected order of life. We may feel guilty that we don't feel what others are feeling, or this loss may trigger memories of past losses, perhaps even ones that we thought were long ago resolved.

Grief can also affect our thinking. We may think we will never get over this, or that we are going crazy. We can feel fatigued, preoccupied, or distracted. Sometimes people experience difficulties sleeping, restlessness, and anxiety, or feel more susceptible to physical illness. For a time, our productivity may be off and our relationships may feel the strain.

### Facing Sudden Loss

We are not prepared to lose someone we know or love in the span of a day or weekend. News of that person's sudden or unexpected death can be shocking, and the shock can intensify our grief. A sudden, unexpected loss can be more disruptive and may feel overwhelming or unbalancing. The sudden absence of this person from our daily lives often leaves conversations cut short, projects unfinished, and relationships unresolved. The world seems unfair or less predictable and we may feel vulnerable, uncertain, or afraid.



**MYTH:** It's important to be 'be strong' in the face of loss.

**FACT:** Crying doesn't mean you are weak. You don't need to 'protect' others by putting on 'a brave face.' Showing your true feelings will help them and you.

**MYTH:** If you don't cry, you aren't sorry about the loss.

**FACT:** Crying is a common response to loss, but it's not the only one. Those who don't cry may feel the pain just as deeply as others. They may simply have other ways of showing it.

## Coping with Grief

**Maintain a routine.** Maintaining a basic routine of daily activities helps you structure your time and keeps you connected to familiar people and places. This will help you maintain a sense of normalcy and security and lessen any additional stress.

**Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising.** Sleep is healing for both your mind and body. Try to maintain healthy sleep habits like going to bed at the same time each night. You may not feel hungry, but your body still needs healthy nutritious foods. Avoid overeating or loading up on junk food to 'soothe' your grief. It may be hard to get motivated when you're grieving, but even a gentle walk outdoors can help reset your perspective.

**Seek to find meaning.** Consider what this person meant to you, and what you learned from him or her. Think about what you've discovered about yourself, about others, or about life as a result of going through this loss.

**Forgive yourself.** Forgive yourself for things you regret doing or saying to your loved one, as well as things you regret not doing or saying. Letting go of regrets will allow you to focus on and find comfort in positive memories.

**Set aside time to express your thoughts and feelings privately.** Give yourself permission to grieve, and allow yourself to fully experience the pain of your loss. Take a moment to think about your loved one and experience the feelings that arise. Don't judge yourself for these feelings. Allow yourself to cry or try to put your feelings into words by writing in a journal.

**Express your feelings in tangible or creative ways.** Make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life, or do something to honor their memory.

**Be patient with yourself.** Allow your grief to unfold at a pace that is natural for you. Don't judge or criticize yourself for not coping as well or healing as quickly as you think you should. Each person needs to grieve in ways that feel right for them and in their own time frame.

**Give yourself a break from grieving.** It is important to take breaks from grieving to enjoy pleasant activities and supportive interactions with family members and friends. Do things that are relaxing and soothing. For example, go to dinner with friends, watch a movie, or enjoy the outdoors. Remember that it is okay to laugh and feel happy, despite your loss; it is good for you to enjoy yourself and remain active and engaged with life.

**Do not grieve alone;** lean on the people who care about you. The single most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. Sharing your loss makes the burden of grief easier to carry. When family and friends get together, it helps people feel less isolated in their grief. Even when you don't feel like talking, it can help just to be with others who also loved the person who died.

**Share memories and stories.** This can be comforting and strengthen our connection to our lost loved one.

**Join in grief rituals and ceremonies.** They acknowledge the pain of our loss while also offering social support and a reaffirmation of life.

**Share your feelings.** Mutual support can help everyone get through the grieving process. Even if you aren't usually comfortable talking about your feelings, it's important to express them when you're grieving. Think of someone you trust with whom you can share your feelings. Find time to talk to that person about what you're going through and how the loss is affecting you.

**Spiritual activities that are meaningful to you can offer comfort,** such as praying, meditating, going to church, or talking to a pastor or others in your faith community.

**Talk to a therapist at the Biola Counseling Center.** A trained counselor can offer support and structure to help you come to terms with the loss and manage your grief more effectively.

### For more information and resources, check out:

<http://www.hellogrief.org/>

<http://whatsyourgrief.com/>

<http://www.griefwatch.com/>



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