

Grief and Loss

What is grief?

Grief is an emotional reaction that follows the loss of someone or something of personal value. Grief is a natural response to loss.

Any loss can cause grief. Death is the most common cause, but there are many others. Losses like divorce, losing a job, losing a pet, or a child moving out can all result in grief. Fire and natural disasters can cause terrible losses, too.

Sometimes people are afraid that they should not feel the way they do when they are grieving.

Sometimes grief can become clinical depression. You should not try to overcome clinical depression by yourself. Depression can be successfully treated with therapy, antidepressant medicine, or both.

What are signs of grief?

The following signs are all common and normal in grief:

- Feeling guilty about things you did or didn't do before the loss
- Feeling like you should have been the one who died
- Thinking you hear or see the person who died
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Having difficulty focusing on tasks
- Having physical symptoms such as a headache or nausea
- Not wanting to eat, exercise, or be around other people

There are 4 tasks of grief that most people go through when mourning the death of a loved one. They are:

1. **Accept the reality of the loss.** This means knowing that your loved one is no longer alive and can't be a part of your everyday life.
2. **Work through the pain of grief.** You will have a variety of intense feelings as you work through your grief. Some of them may not be pleasant, but allow yourself to feel them anyway. It is OK to cry, and it is also OK to laugh when you remember good times with your loved one.
3. **Adjust to a different reality.** This is the time to deal with the changes that come as a result of the death. You might have to take on new tasks, do things differently, or give up some activities. You start to see the impact that the death had on your day to day life.
4. **Move on with life.** This is the time to loosen your ties to the person who died, put them safely in your memory, and start to invest your time and energy into living again.

These tasks may not happen in this exact order. This is normal. Do not judge yourself badly for needing time before you "get on with your life."

Grief takes its own time. Grief may last only a few days, or it may last many months. Grief may return during the holidays, or on the anniversary of your loved one's death or birthday. Try to focus on the good times you had together rather than on your loss. It helps to spend time with friends or family when you feel alone and lonely. Be kind to yourself.

How can I take care of myself?

There are ways to help yourself deal with grief and loss. These include:

- **Cry.** Some people fear that if they start crying, they will be unable to stop. This is not true. The best thing you can do with your grief is to cry and talk it out.
- **Postpone major decisions** or life changes (such as selling your home and moving) until your judgment and perspective return.
- **Get support.** Talk with family and friends. Tell your friends that it is okay to talk about your loss and let you know they care. Consider joining a support group in your area. Grief support groups are very helpful.
- **Learn to manage stress.** Ask for help at home and work when the load is too great to handle. Find ways to relax, for example take up a hobby, listen to music, watch movies, or take walks. Try deep breathing exercises when you feel stressed.
- **Take care of your physical health.** Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Eat a healthy diet. Limit caffeine. If you smoke, quit. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Exercise according to your healthcare provider's instructions.
- Ask your healthcare provider or therapist what symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them.

Get emergency care if you have serious thoughts of suicide or self-harm, violence, or harming others.

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