

Coping with Grief



What is grief?

Grief is a natural response to loss. It is the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. You may associate grief with the death of a loved one – and this type of loss does often cause the most intense grief. However, any loss can cause grief, including the loss of a job, a break up, or a major life transition, like moving or retiring. The more significant the loss, the more intense the grief might be.

Grief vs. Depression

Distinguishing between grief and clinical depression is not always easy, since they share many symptoms. However, there are ways to tell the difference. Remember, grief can be a roller coaster. It involves a wide variety of emotions and a mix of good and bad days. Even when you are in the middle of the grieving process, you will have moments of pleasure or happiness. With depression, on the other hand, the feelings of emptiness and despair are constant.

It is important to understand the following facts about grief:

- There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief can be an emotional rollercoaster, with unpredictable highs, lows, and setbacks. Everyone grieves differently.
- Grief may involve extreme emotions and behaviors. These feelings and behaviors are normal. Do not judge them as wrong.
- There is no set timetable for grieving. Recovery after bereavement takes 18 to 24 months, but for others, the grieving process may be longer or shorter.
- 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 did not say or do.
- Anger – Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry at 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, and insecure or have panic attacks. It can trigger fears about your own mortality.
- Physical symptoms- Grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

What can You Do About It?

- 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, 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.
- Turn to friends and family members – Now is the time to lean on the people who care about you, even if you take pride in being strong and self-sufficient. Oftentimes, people want to help but don't know how, so tell them what you need – whether it's a shoulder to cry on or help with funeral arrangements.
- Draw comfort from your faith – If you follow a religious tradition, embrace the comfort its mourning rituals can provide. Spiritual activities that are meaningful to you – such as praying, meditating, or going to church – can offer comfort.
- Join a support group – Grief can feel very lonely, even when you have loved ones around. Sharing your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses can help. Talk to a therapist or grief counselor – If your grief feels like too much to bear, call a mental health professional with experience in grief counseling. An experienced therapist can help you work through intense emotions.
- Face your feelings.. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.
- 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
- Look after your physical health. The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially.
- 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.

The original article, Coping with Grief and Loss; Coping with Grief and Loss Can be found at: http://helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss.htm

To talk with a Bucks Counselor, call 215.968.8189 or email counseling@bucks.edu to schedule an appointment.

It's FREE and confidential.