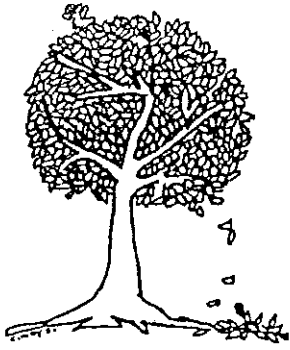


Coping with Grief



Life Transitions Center, Inc.

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RESPONSES TO LOSS

When we lose someone or something we cherish, we will respond emotionally, psychologically, physically and spiritually. Any or all of these responses may be considered normal and healthy under the circumstances of grief in which we find ourselves.

Emotional Responses

- *Shock
- *Denial
- *Disbelief/Numbness
- *Guilt and Self-blame
- *Fear
- *Feelings of Loss/Loneliness
- *Emptiness
- *Sadness/Depression

- *Disorganization
- *Panic
- *Relief
- *Powerlessness
- *Anger/Rage
- *Hopelessness
- *Shame

Psychological Responses

- *Inability to Concentrate
- *Explosive Emotions
- *Low Self-Esteem

- *Lack of Interest
- *Prolonged Withdrawal
- *Inability to Experience Pleasure

Physical Responses

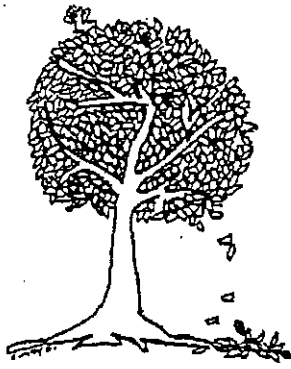
- *Tiredness/Lack of Energy
- *Difficulty Sleeping or Prolonged Periods of Sleep
- *Excessive Appetite or Lack of Appetite
- *Tightness in Chest
- *Shortness of Breath

- *Ulcers
- *Heart Problems
- *Stomach Pain
- *General Nervousness and Trembling
- *Lump in the Throat
- *Headaches
- *Loss of Muscular Strength

Spiritual Responses

- *Anger with God
- *Doubts about Belief System
- *Questions Regarding Meaning of Life
- *Interest in Afterlife

- *Changed Priorities
- *Search for Meaning in the Event
- *Gratitude for Time Spent Together
- *Belief that Person is Happier, No Longer Suffering, in a Better Place, etc.



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Grieving: Am I Doing it Right?

The death of a loved one can be the most difficult, stressful, and confusing experience an individual has to go through. Many people ask, "Am I going crazy? Am I doing this the right way? Why do I feel like this?"

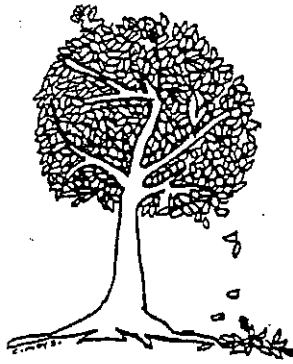
There is no right or wrong way to grieve. It is important, however, to grieve. One should not block out or run away from the pain of grieving. Everybody grieves differently. There are as many individual ways to express grief as there are fingerprints.

Feelings of anger, guilt, sadness, loneliness, depression, yearning and relief can run circles through one's heart and mind. When a death has just occurred, there is usually a period of shock and disbelief: This can't be. I can't believe he is dead. Individuals often describe this stage as feeling like they are walking around on another planet. We go through the motions, but it seems unreal. As time goes on the grief sets in. You need to be good to yourself. Grief is hard work. It may be difficult to sleep and eat. It may be hard to concentrate. Lower your expectations. Reach out to your friends and family. Talk. Express your feelings. Exercise.

Many people who are grieving feel abandoned by their support system three to six months after the death. Their friends and family have gone on with their own lives. But for the grieving person the pain is still there. Loneliness, guilt, anger, depression, and a loss of self-esteem may set in. Find someone to talk to. Seek counseling or a support group. Talking helps. In some cases, individuals have experienced the long illness of their loved one. A sense of relief may follow their death. This is appropriate and the individual should not feel guilty. They also may have grieved their loved one's death throughout the duration of the terminal illness. Thus much of the grief work may already be done.

It is important to let yourself feel the grief. Each individual will have his own way to let the grief out. Some will cry. Others will not. Some will visit the grave every day. Some will not. Some will dream of and yearn for the deceased. Others will not. There is no right or wrong way. It is only important to face the grief and not to avoid it. Let out the feelings. Lean into the pain. Express your anger, guilt, sadness and loneliness. Seek professional help if you become overwhelmed and need someone to talk to.

Lee Dixon Sheets, CSW



Grief is a normal and natural reaction to the death of a loved one.

Most of us are not prepared for the long journey of grief which is sometimes devastating, frightening and often lonely. We may think, do and say things that are very unlike us. There seems to be no respite, no end to the intense feelings that we experience.

Grief has been likened to a raw open wound. With great care it eventually will heal but there will always be a scar. Life will never be the same but eventually you will get better.

The experiences of grief have been compared to enduring a fierce storm at sea. The waves are peaked and close together. Eventually the sea becomes calmer, but occasionally the storm regroups, strengthening without any warning. For several hours, days, or weeks, you may not feel grief; then suddenly you meet someone, or see something, or hear something, and grief resumes. It seems as if you are taking one step forward and two back.

Grief has its common and its unique sides. Although it is a universal experience, no two people grieve the same, even in the same family. Like a snowflake or a fingerprint, each person's grief has characteristics all its own.

It is important to understand some of the following concepts about grief:

GRIEF WORK: The expression of "grief work" is very true. It may be the hardest work that you will ever perform. It is draining.

CONTROL: We cannot control the feelings

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Experiences of Grief

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that arise within us. These feelings come from deep inside, but we can choose what to do with them. We can accept or reject them. To deny only prolongs our grief. Remember, what we do determines whether we remain in our grief or survive. Feelings are not bad or wrong. They should be recognized and faced honestly.

CHOICES: About grief: there are no choices, you must go through it. The expression of grief is essential for good emotional and physical health even though it is painful and difficult. There are no easy answers or short cuts, no way under, over or around your grief. Although grief may hurt desperately, you must go through it.

MAJOR DECISIONS: It is strongly suggested not to make major decisions (such as moving, money matters, etc.) unless absolutely necessary during the early stages of grief when judgement is cloudy. The conventional wisdom, "Never act in haste" was never more applicable. **LISTENERS:** Find someone who will listen. Talking is therapy.

GRIEF HAS NO TIMETABLE: Grief often takes much longer than the bereaved or the people in their lives expect. It helps to take one hour, one day at a time.

REMEMBER: People have a natural inclination to recover. Eventually you'll look back and realize: you weren't going crazy... you were grieving.

Be patient with yourself.
Recovering from grief takes time.

Managing Intense Feelings Associated with Loss

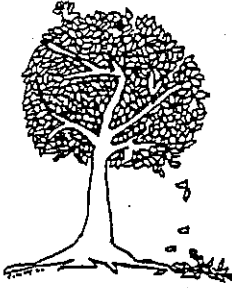
The death of a loved one brings on intense emotions that may feel overwhelming and unending. You cannot control the feelings that arise within, but you can choose what you do with them.

The following are five steps to managing intense feelings:

- 1. **RECOGNIZE** your feelings. Feelings are a normal reaction to grief. You need not be afraid of them.*
- 2. **NAME** your feelings. There are no "good" or "bad" or "right or wrong" feelings. All feelings including anger and resentment, are natural responses to loss.*
- 3. **ACCEPT** your feelings. When you take ownership of your feelings they lose their power to cause you harm. Denying or ignoring feelings hampers the grief process.*
- 4. **EXPERIENCE** your feelings. Give yourself permission to confront them so you can move beyond their immobilizing effect.*
- 5. **EXPRESS** your feelings. Find constructive ways of working through them. Taking action has a cleansing effect and the intensity of your feelings will diminish. When you allow yourself choices, you are taking control of your life and refusing to be a victim.*

Feeling your feelings is how you heal from your loss. Peace, acceptance, and new beginnings are on the other side.

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ON DEALING WITH DEATH

by Rev. Kenneth Czillinger

1. Generally it takes 18-24 months just to STABILIZE after the death of a family member. It can take much longer when the death was a violent one. Recognize the length of the mourning process. Beware of developing unrealistic expectations of yourself.
2. Your worst times usually are not at the moment a tragic event takes place. Then you're in a state of shock or numbness. Often you slide "into the pits" 4-7 months after the event. Strangely, when you're in the pits and tempted to despair, this may be the time when most people expect you to be over your loss.
3. When people ask you how you're doing, don't always say, "fine." Let some people know how terrible you feel.
4. Talking with a true friend or with others who've been there and survived can be very helpful. Those who've been there speak your language. Only they can say, "I know, I understand." You are not alone.
5. Often depression is a cover for anger. Learn to uncork your bottle and find appropriate ways to release your bottled-up anger. What you're going through seems so unfair and unjust.
6. Take time to lament, to experience being a victim. It may be necessary to spend some time feeling sorry for yourself. "Pity parties" sometimes are necessary and can be therapeutic.
7. It's all right to cry, to question, to be weak. Beware of allowing yourself to be "put on a pedestal" by others who tell you what an inspiration you are because of your strength and your ability to cope so well. If they only knew!
8. Remember, you may be a rookie at the grief experience you're going through. This may be the first death of someone close. You're new at this, and you don't know what to do or how to act. You need help.
9. Reach out and try to help others in some small ways at least. This little step forward may help prevent you from dwelling on yourself.
10. Many times of crisis ultimately can become times of opportunity. Mysteriously, your faith in yourself, in others and in God can be deepened through crisis. Seek out persons who can serve as symbols of hope to you.

10 Practical Tips to Help a Friend Through Grief

prepared by Nancy B. Ross

- 1. Respond to the death as soon as possible.**
Don't assume the person is fine or that closer friends or relatives are enough to fill the void.
- 2. Notice things.**
What do they need and what can you do? Don't expect to be asked... it's a confusing and unpredictable time for everyone. Think about providing some of the essentials... tissues, extra coffee, disposable glasses, cups, plates, napkins, paper towels, toilet paper, baggies and containers for leftovers. None of these are perishable and can be returned or used later.
- 3. Remember that shock may carry the bereaved through those first few days.**
A certain amount of shock is common even when the death is expected. Shock just softens the impact of reality and allows the grief-stricken some time to absorb the facts. Respond to their immediate needs; most often the tough stuff comes later.
- 4. Avoid clichés and references to God unless otherwise indicated.**
You might consider a heartfelt, "I'm sorry," "I don't know what to say," or a warm hug.
- 5. Don't relate this death to ones that you have experienced.**
It's not your grief, and your feelings and coping style are not exactly like anyone else's.
- 6. Encourage and/or allow tears.**
Crying is a normal and healthy reaction to grief. Provide a shoulder and a tissue.
- 7. Avoid judgement of the grief-stricken.**
Most often, they can't even think straight. Almost anything is acceptable at first, as long as it isn't physically harmful to the bereaved or those around them.
- 8. Encourage talking and reminiscing.**
Bring up your good memories. Say their name! Remember, the important thing is that our deceased loved ones lived, not that they died.
- 9. Listen... and listen... and listen.**
"Just be there" when you can, and when you have the courage and the energy. Being with the bereaved is hard and exhausting work.
- 10. Hang in there if you can.**
Be careful about offering advice or suggestions, as your friend's feelings will be changing for quite awhile. If the death was particularly traumatic or complicated, a few counseling sessions could be a consideration later on.



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**SUGGESTIONS FOR
HELPING YOURSELF
THROUGH GRIEF**

This title is not meant to indicate that others in our lives do not help us through grief. We do need the help of relatives and friends, and may need the help of professional counseling. At the same time, it is important for us to make the effort to help ourselves. Remember that grief takes a lot of energy. Treat yourself with the same care and affection that you would offer to a good friend in the same situation. Most of us are aware of "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR" -we forget the part - "AS YOU LOVE YOURSELF." Not all suggestions will be helpful to everyone. Grief has its unique sides. Choose the ideas that appeal to you.

BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF

- Go gently. Don't rush too much. Your body, mind and heart need energy to mend.
- Don't take on new responsibilities right away. Don't over extend yourself. Keep decision making to a minimum.
- Don't compare yourself to other bereaved. It may seem that you aren't adjusting as well as they; in reality you don't know what's behind their public facade.
- Throw away notions of a fixed period of mourning: one year and then you're "over it." This is fiction. Grief takes time, whatever time it takes.

ASK FOR AND ACCEPT HELP

- Don't be afraid to ask for help from those close to you when you need it. So much hurt and pain go unheeded during grief because we don't want to bother anyone else with our problems. Wouldn't you want someone close to you to ask for help if they needed it? Our family and friends will not be able to handle your grief. It is very important to find someone who cares, and understands with whom you may talk freely. Seek out an understanding friend, another bereaved person or a support group member.
- Accept help and support when offered. It's okay to need comforting. Often people wait to be told when you're ready to talk or if you need anything. Tell them.
- Pray to the person who has died.
- If you are troubled and need help, contact your local twenty-four hour hotline.
- Join a self-help group. They offer support, understanding, friendship and HOPE.
- Give yourself some time to sort out your thoughts but don't build a wall around yourself in fear of being hurt again. It is important to love and enjoy the people in your life instead of distancing yourself from them.
- If grief is intense and prolonged, it may harm your physical and mental well being. If it is necessary, seek out a competent counselor. Check to see if your health insurance covers the charges. It is important to take care of yourself.

ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS

- Feel what you feel. You don't choose your emotions, they choose you.
- It's okay to cry. Crying makes you feel better.
- It's okay to be angry. You may be angry with yourself, God, the person who died, others, or just angry in general. Don't push it down. Let it out (hit a pillow or punching bag, scream, swim, chop wood, exercise, etc.).
- Thinking you are going crazy is a very normal reaction. Most grieving people experience this. You are not losing your mind, only reacting to the death.
- Depression is common to those in grief. Be careful not to totally withdraw yourself from others. If your depression becomes severe or you're considering suicide, get professional help immediately.
- The emotions of a survivor are often raw. It is important to let these feelings out. If you don't, they will come out some other time, some other way. That is certain. You won't suffer nearly as much from "getting too upset" as you will from being brave and keeping your honest emotions all locked up inside. Share your "falling to pieces" with supportive loved ones, as often as you feel the need.
- You may have psychosomatic complaints, physical problems brought on by an emotional reaction. The physical problems are real; take steps to remedy them.

LEAN INTO THE PAIN

- Lean into the pain. It can not be outrun. You can't go around it, over it or under it; you must go through it and feel the full force of the pain to survive. Be careful not to get stuck at some phase. Keep working on your grief.
- Save time to grieve and time to face the grief. Don't throw yourself into your work or other activities that leave you no time for grieving.
- In a time of severe grief be extremely careful in the use of either alcohol or prescription drugs. Tranquilizers don't end the pain; they only mask it. This may lead to further withdrawal, loneliness and even addiction. Grief work is done best when you are awake, not drugged into sleepiness.
- Seek the help of a counselor or clergy if grief is unresolved.
- Be determined to work through your grief.

BE GOOD TO YOURSELF

- Keep a journal. It is a good way to understand what you are feeling and thinking. Hopefully, when you reread it later you will see that you are getting better.
- Try to get adequate rest. Go to bed earlier. Avoid caffeine in coffee, tea and colas.
- Good nutrition is important.
- If Sundays, holidays, etc., are especially difficult times, schedule activities that you find particularly comforting into these time periods.
- Read recommended books on grief. It helps you to understand what you are going through. You may find suggestions for coping.
- Moderate exercise helps (walking, tennis, swimming, etc.). It offers an opportunity to work off frustration and may aid sleep.
- Begin to build a pleasant time with family and friends. Don't feel guilty if you have a good time. Your loved one would want you to be happy. They would want you to live this life to the fullest and to the best of your ability.
- Do things a little differently, yet try not to make a lot of changes. This sounds like a contradiction, but it is not.

- Plan things to which you can look forward - a trip, visit, lunch with a special friend. Start today to build memories for tomorrow.
- Find quotes or posters that are helpful to you and hang where you can see them.
- Become involved in the needs of others. Helping others will build your self-confidence and enhance your self-worth. Join either a volunteer or support group, i.e. phoning; attending meetings; typing; collating newsletters. It does much to ease the pain.
- Be good to yourself: take a hot relaxing bath; bask in the sun; take time for yourself (movie, theater, dinner out, read a novel).
- Put balance in your life: pray, rest, work, read, relax.
- When you feel ready, aim at regaining a healthy, balanced life by broadening your interests. Take time for activities that can bring some purpose into your life. Think about doing something you've always wanted to do: taking a class, community projects or hobby clubs. Learn and do something new as well as rediscover old interests, activities and friends.
- Remember: Take your life one moment, one hour, one day at a time.

REMEMBER-GRIEF TAKES TIME

- Do not have unrealistic expectations of yourself. Grief takes TIME. It comes and goes.
- Remember, you will get better. Hold on to HOPE. Some days you just seem to exist, but better days will be back. You will develop a renewed sense of purpose gradually.