

How To Deal With Grief And Loss



Loss is an inevitable part of life, and grief is a natural part of the healing process. The reasons for grief are many, such as the loss of a loved one, the loss of health, or the letting go of a long-held dream. Dealing with a significant loss can be one of the most difficult times in a person's life.

Different Kinds of Loss

Feelings of loss are very personal, and the significance assigned to a loss is unique to each individual. People commonly associate certain losses with strong feelings of grief. These can include:

- Death of a partner
- Death of a parent
- Serious illness of a loved one
- Death of a child
- Death of a friend or family member
- Relationship breakup

Subtle or less obvious losses can also cause strong feelings of grief. Some examples include:

- Change in or loss of a job
- Graduation from school
- Illness/loss of health
- Death of a pet
- Drastic changes in daily routine
- Loss of financial security
- Moving to a new home
- Loss of a physical ability
- Loss of social status
- Loss of support services

Sudden Versus Predictable Loss

Sudden or shocking losses due to events like crimes, accidents, or suicide can be traumatic. There is no way to prepare. They can challenge a person's sense of security and confidence in the predictability of life. An individual may experience symptoms such as sleep disturbance, distressing thoughts, depressed mood, social isolation, or severe anxiety. Predictable losses, like those due to terminal illness, sometimes allow more time to prepare for the loss. However, they create two layers of grief: the grief related to the anticipation of the loss and the grief related to the loss itself.

- Grief is a normal reaction to a significant loss, such as the death of a loved one, loss of a job, or loss of health.
- The significance assigned to a loss is unique to each individual.
- The length of the grief process is different for everyone.
- Common grief reactions include sadness, frustration, anger, fear, and fatigue.
- Healthy coping strategies for grief include talking with family and friends, engaging in social activities, exercising, eating healthy food, joining a support group, and talking with a counselor.

How Long Does Grief Last?

The length of the grief process is different for everyone. There is no predictable schedule for grief. Although it can be quite painful at times, the grief process should not be rushed. It is important for a person to be patient with themselves as they experience their unique reactions to the loss. With time and support, things generally do get better. However, it is normal for significant dates, holidays, or other reminders to trigger feelings related to the loss. Taking care of themselves, seeking support, and acknowledging their feelings during these times are ways that can help an individual cope.



Wheeler

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Normal Grief Reactions

When experiencing grief, it is common to:

- Feel sad or depressed
- Be angry (at the deceased, oneself, others, higher powers)
- Experience guilt or remorse
- Have difficulty concentrating
- Feel numb
- Feel frustrated or misunderstood
- Experience anxiety, nervousness, or fearfulness
- Feel the need to escape
- Be ambivalent
- Lack energy and motivation

Grief As A Process Of Healing

It is important to note that the grief process is not linear, but is more often experienced in cycles. Grief is sometimes compared to climbing a spiral staircase where things can look and feel like the person is just going in circles, yet they are actually making progress. The individual should be encouraged to be patient with the process and allow themselves to have any feelings about the loss. If they feel stuck in their grief, they may find that talking to a counselor or a supportive person may help them move forward in the healing process.

Culture, Rituals, and Ceremonies

A person's cultural background can affect how they understand and approach the grief process. Some cultures anticipate a time to grieve and have developed rituals to help people through the grief process. Grief rituals and ceremonies acknowledge the pain of loss while also offering social support and a reaffirmation of life.

An individual may not be aware of how their own cultural background affects their grief process. Talking with family, friends or faith leaders is one way to strengthen their awareness of possible cultural influences in their life. Friends and family may be able to help them generate ideas to create their own rituals. Some have found solace in creating their own unconventional ceremonies, such as a funeral or ceremony with personal friends in a private setting.

Coping With Grief

Each person has an individual style of coping with painful experiences. The list below may help a person generate ideas about how to manage their feelings of grief.

- Talk to family or friends
- Engage in social activities
- Seek spiritual support
- Listen to music
- Seek counseling
- Exercise
- Take time to relax
- Be patient with oneself
- Read poetry or books
- Eat healthy, good foods
- Join a support group
- Let oneself feel grief

An individual may want to experiment with these ideas or create a list of their own. Talking to friends who have dealt with loss in the past can help a person identify new ways of coping. Only the individual knows what works best with their personality and lifestyle. One way to examine their own style of coping is to recall the ways they have dealt with painful times in the past. It's important to note that some ways of coping with grief are helpful, like talking to others or writing in a journal. Others may be hurtful or destructive to the healing process, like misusing substances or isolating from others. Healthy coping skills are important in resolving a loss and helping a person move forward in the healing process.

Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
www.ct.gov/DMHAS

24/7 Access Line
1.800.563.4086

United Way 2-1-1
www.211ct.org
2 .1.1 or 1.800.203.1234

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov

MedlinePlus.gov
medlineplus.gov/bereavement.html

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