

The Grief Experience

[From the Center for Grief Recovery](#)

Grief is the natural healing process that occurs after a significant loss. It is experienced uniquely by each of us, often in waves, with emotional, cognitive, physical and social responses varying in terms of the intensity, duration, and order of our reactions to the loss. There are many components of a loss, and many variables that can affect your grief reaction.

Emotional components of loss can include:

- Shock, numbness, feeling of unreality
- Helplessness
- Vulnerability
- Fearfulness
- Sadness
- Anger, irritability
- Emptiness, loneliness
- Guilt
- Carelessness, harming oneself or others in any way
- Outbursts, euphoria

Physical components of loss can include:

- Fatigue, sleep disturbance
- Decreased or increased appetite
- Physical distress, nausea
- Anxiety, hypo- or hyperactivity
- Greater susceptibility to illness

Social components of loss can include:

- Being unaware of others' needs
- Passivity

Variables that can affect your grief reaction:

- Your own history of past losses, through deaths, divorce, relocation, lost dreams, phase of life changes
- Violations of one's safety (accidents, fire, personal trauma, world crises), or health changes
- Your current personal and situational stressors
- Your personal beliefs in a faith tradition or spiritual practice
- Your cultural and family expectations about loss

- Withdrawing from or avoiding others
- Decreased work productivity
- Loss of interest in usual pleasures, including hobbies and/or relationships
- Strained relationships, differences in grieving needs between self and others

Cognitive components of loss can include:

- Slowed and/or disorganized thinking
- Confusion, aimlessness, difficulty concentrating
- Preoccupation, rumination
- Unaffected, no thoughts at all about the person or the circumstances
- Dreams
- Decreased self-esteem
- Altered perceptions, sensing the presence of the deceased person

- If the loss is anticipated or unanticipated
- If the loss is marked by traumatic events
- The degree to which closure with the person was possible
- A "loss out of season," for the person who has died or for you
- Your ability to share the loss with others
- Your coping style and use of stress management resources
- Working through past hurts and forgiveness issues
- Finding a way to make meaning of the loss

As you can see, grieving is a multifaceted, individualized process for which there is no definitive timetable. Here are some suggestions for dealing with grief:

Talk regularly with a friend

Talking with another about what you think and feel is one of the best things you can do for yourself. It helps relieve some of the pressure you may feel, it can give you a sense of perspective, and it keeps you in touch with others. Look for someone who's a good listener and a caring soul. Then speak what's on your mind and in your heart. If this feels one-sided, let that be okay for this period of your life.

Tell people what helps you and what doesn't.

People around you may not understand what you need. So tell them. If hearing your loved one's name spoken aloud by others feels good, say so. If you need more time alone, or assistance with tasks you're unable to complete, or an occasional hug, be honest. People can't read your mind, so you'll have to speak it.

Carry or wear a linking object.

Carry something in your pocket or purse that reminds you of the one who died – a keepsake they gave you perhaps, or a small object they once carried or used, or a memento you select for just this purpose.

Keep a journal.

Write out your thoughts and feelings. Do this whenever you feel the urge, but do it at least several times a week, if not several times a day. Don't censor what you write – be just as honest as you can. In time, go back through your writings and notice how you're changing and growing.

Create a memory area.

In a space that feels appropriate, arrange a small tableau that honors the person: a framed photograph or two, perhaps a prized possession or award, or something they created, or something they loves.

Write the person who died.

Write letters or other messages to your loved one, thoughts you wish you could express if they were present.

Consider a support group.

Spending time with a small group of people who have undergone a similar life experience can be very therapeutic.

Screen your entertainment.

Some shows, music, books, movies, or other forms of media and social media are best not viewed when you're deep in grief. Recognize what experiences bring up too many feelings to handle comfortably and limit those for now.

Allow yourself to express whatever emotions you are feeling.

A good rule of thumb is this: if you feel like crying, then cry. If you feel like laughing (or something else), allow yourself to express that.

Do something for someone else.

Step out of your own problems from time to time and devote your attention to someone else. Offer a gift or your service. Do this for yourself as much as for the other.

Structure alone time.

In addition to being around family, friends, and other supports, make sure you also have time to be by yourself. A large part of the grieving process involves what goes on inside yourself – your thoughts, your feelings, your memories, your hopes and dreams.

Attend to self-care.

Eat healthy foods. Drink plenty of water or other non-caffeinated, low-sugar liquids. Incorporate exercise and relaxation into your weekly routine. Be aware of numbing your grief with alcohol, marijuana or other substances. Supplement your diet with vitamins C, B2, and B6, as well as calcium and magnesium.