

Grief, Bereavement and Mourning

Bereavement: the period of grief and mourning after the death of a loved one.

Grief: the personal response to the loss.

Mourning: the public expression of that loss.

Grief

Grief reactions are different and depend on many things. This includes who we are, who we lost, our relationship with that person, and how affected we are by the loss.

Different people express grief differently and may have different grief responses for different losses.

Reactions to grief and loss include emotional, behavioral, and physical symptoms. Reactions often change over time. All are normal for a short period of time.

How long grief lasts is different from person to person. The average recovery time is 18 to 24 months.

Grief reactions can also be stronger around important dates. For example, the anniversary of the person's death, birthdays, and holidays.



Emotional Reaction

- Shock, denial, numbness
- Sadness, anxiety, guilt, fear
- Anger at others or a religious higher power or being or god
- Irritability (easily upset), frustration

Behavioral Reaction

- Crying suddenly
- Sleep changes (less or more sleep)
- Not eating
- Changes in weight
- Withdrawn and emotionally distant from others
- Hard to concentrate, restless, difficult to make decisions

Physical Reaction

- Exhausted, very tired
- Less energy
- Memory problems
- Upset stomach
- Pain and headaches

Other Symptoms of Grief

Symptoms that are not normal and may be a sign to get professional help include:

- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Violence
- Thoughts of killing oneself

Grief, Bereavement and Mourning

Stages of Grief

These stages do not always go in order. You may move back and forth among some of the stages. You may even skip some. The stages are a guide to help understand grief.

Denial

- Not accepting the loss
- Holds in the shock of loss
- Denial is a safety mechanism to block out grief for some time

Sadness and Depression

- Deep, intense grief and mourning
- May feel overwhelming
- May cry often and suddenly
- May not want to be around people or do things you often enjoy
- Try to stay active as possible and seek support
- It is important to let yourself work through all the different emotions

Anger

- Anger at the person who died, friends and relatives, others or a religious higher power or being or god
- It is important to have a way to let go of anger with activities like exercise, hobbies, or therapy
- Feelings of guilt, shame, and blame need to be dealt with

Acceptance

- Coming to terms with the loss
- Does not mean you stop thinking about the person who is gone
- Shows you are willing to change to your new situation as you carry the memory of your loved one with you

Grief, Bereavement and Mourning

How to Help Yourself

- 1. Give yourself time to grieve.** It is normal and important to express and work through your grief. Holding in your feelings may be unhelpful and may prolong your grief.
- 2. Find supportive people to talk to.** The support of others may be the most helpful. Do not be afraid to tell them how they can best help, even if it means just listening. It is often very helpful to talk about your loss with people who let you show your emotions.
- 3. Take care of your health.** Often after a loss, we stop doing the things we need to for our health. For example, exercising, eating right, keeping doctor visits, or taking prescribed medications. If you are on a health care treatment, it is important to keep following it.
- 4. Postpone major life changes.** Give yourself time to adjust to your loss before making plans to change jobs, move, sell your home or remarry. Grief can sometimes cloud your judgment and you being able to make decisions.
- 5. Keep a journal.** It is often helpful to write or tell the story of your loss and what it means to you. It may help you work through your feelings.
- 6. Take part in activities.** It can be helpful to stay active with exercise, fun activities, outings with supportive others, or new hobbies. These activities can help us get through hard times.
- 7. Find a way to memorialize your loved one.** Ideas include planting a tree or garden in the name of your loved one, dedicating a work to their memory, giving to a charity in their name.
- 8. Find more support and help.** For example, joining grief-support groups or contacting a grief counselor.



Remember that feeling sad is an important part of normal bereavement. Staying active and finding support from others can help you to work through the grief process.

Grief, Bereavement and Mourning

Other Reading

- **Grieving Mindfully: A Compassionate and Spiritual Guide to Coping with Loss**
by Sameet Kumar
- **The Year of Magical Thinking**
by Joan Didion
- **Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy** by Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant
- **Tear Soup, A Recipe for Healing After Loss**
by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen
- **I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye** by Brook Noel and Pamela Blair

