



# Grief & Loss

A Journey, Not an Event

The intensity of the pain of grief may seem overwhelming. We may become frightened by our feelings and reactions. We may question if we are grieving the “right way.” We may even wonder if these feelings are normal or question if we are losing our minds. Remember, feelings are neither right nor wrong—they just are.



Most people who suffer a loss experience some or all of the following in various degrees of intensity.

**Shock-Disbelief-Denial** “It can’t be true.” “There is some mistake.” You may feel as though the loss isn’t real, that it didn’t actually happen.

**Sadness** Feeling of loss-tearful, crying

**Anger** Often displaced, it may be directed at God, other family members, medical personnel

**Guilt** “If only I had or had not...” This feeling accompanies almost every death to some degree. A normal feeling, but usually unrealistic.

**Anxiety** Fear of being able to take care of yourself “I won’t be able to survive without him/her”

**Loneliness** Especially felt by those who shared a close day-to-day relationship with the deceased. Our self-esteem and identity may be threatened after the loss of the person who made us feel special.

**Fatigue** Feeling tired/unmotivated

**Helplessness** One factor that makes the event of death so stressful is the sense of helplessness it can engender.

**Yearning** An intense longing for the deceased to walk through the door at the usual time, hearing their voice, seeing their face.

**Relief** Relief for the deceased, if they suffered before death. Relief can also come if there was a difficult relationship with the deceased.

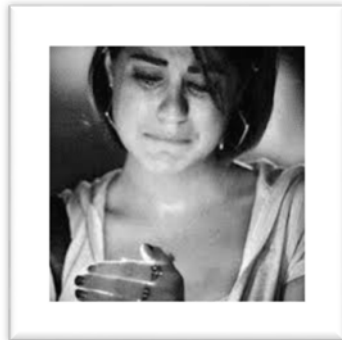
**Fear** “What’s going to happen to me?” “What if I lose others I love?”

**Envy/Resentment** “It’s not fair-others seem so happy.”

**Depression** A sense of despair and hopelessness.

**Past Losses** A recent loss may trigger feelings connected with past life losses. You may find that you are dealing with more than one loss.

**These are all  
normal  
feelings.**



Just as the seasons change, the intensity of your feelings will also change. Try to remember, grief is a journey, not an event. It takes time to heal the wounds of grief.

# You May Experience the Following Behaviors as You Go Through the Grieving Process

## Sleep disturbances:

- Can't fall asleep
- Early morning wakening
- Wanting to withdraw and sleep all the time
- Nightmares-many of a "rescue nature"
- Dreaming of the deceased

## Appetite disturbances:

- Weight loss or weight gain
- Lack of appetite or increased appetite

## Preoccupations with the one who died:

- Telling the same story over and over again

## Inability to concentrate:

- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty seeing a task to completion, feeling "spacey"
- Time confusion
- Short attention span
- Distracted
- Daydreaming

## Social withdrawal:

- Isolation (both emotionally and physically)
- Avoid gatherings, social opportunities
- May feel abandoned by family or friends
- In certain situations, feel like the "3<sup>rd</sup> wheel"

## Sudden mood swings:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Fear
- Irritability
- Anxiety, panic feelings

## Experiencing physical symptoms and/or distress:

- Tightness in throat
- Chest pain-“a broken heart”
- Sighing
- A lack of muscle power, like “Everything seems so heavy”
- Digestive symptoms
- Fatigue/exhaustion
- A sense of panic
- Restlessness
- Lack of strength
- Anxiety

## Spiritual effects:

- Searching for meaning of the loss
- Anger with God (or higher power)
- Questioning of core beliefs



# Working through Grief



- Grief is a very personal experience. Do not compare yourself to others. There is not a right way to grieve. There are no timetables.
- Accept your feelings. Express them in appropriate ways: talking, writing, crying, and physical activities such as exercise may all be effective means of expression.
- The chances of developing a serious illness can be several times higher than normal after a major loss-take special care of your body. Good nutrition, rest and exercise are all important.
- Allow others to help you. Share your pain. Ask for help when you need it most.
- Take time before making major decisions if possible. Grief drains you of your energy. It is too difficult to concentrate. Take time if you can.
- Avoid numbing the pain with drugs or alcohol or prescription medications.
- Recognize that grief responses and grief feelings are normal, even though they seem bizarre.
- Live one day at a time-heal at your own pace.
- Develop a balance in your life. There are times you need to be with others, but also times you will want to be alone.

- Reach out to others who are hurting.
- Plan things to look forward to-reasons to get up in the morning.
- Keep meaningful mementos of your loved on, but do not erect a memorial shrine.
- Remember that no one is perfect and no relationship is perfect.
- Do one good thing for yourself each day. Do some needed chores, help someone else, pay attention to your personal appearance.
- Find diversion: take walks, find a hobby, travel, and reach out to others.
- Create your own list of suggestions. Ask yourself questions such as: What has helped me cope in the past? Who or what seems to give me strength and comfort?

**Above all, hold on to hope.**





Grief is a very personal experience and each person grieves in his own way. River Counseling Services is available to offer hope in an individual or group setting as you learn what you need as you experience grief and loss.

For further information, please call (605) 337-3444.



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