

## Coping With Grief



Grief is a normal and healthy reaction to some kind of change or loss in your life. You may grieve the death of a loved one. Or you may grieve the loss of your job, your house, your marriage, or your health. Grief is all the feelings that come with these kinds of changes and losses.

Feelings of grief are different for each person. Your grief will depend on the meaning of that loss to you. The grieving process doesn't happen in a predictable way. But over time, your grief will subside. Give yourself all the time you need to identify, accept, and express your emotions.

Sometimes the symptoms of grief can look like depression. But grief is different from depression. Grief is a natural healing process that can help you adjust to change and loss. Depression is more than the normal sadness that comes with a major life change or loss. It is an illness that can often get better with treatment. If you are having a hard time dealing with your grief or think you may be depressed, talk with your doctor or a counselor.

### What can you expect when you grieve?

When grieving, it is normal to:

- Feel sad and yearn for who or what you have lost. These feelings are central to all grieving.
- Feel worry, confusion, anger, or guilt.
- Be overly sensitive to others' behavior.
- React strongly to seemingly minor losses or changes when they trigger feelings of grief over your major loss.
- Feel insecure and alone, and want to stay away from people.

As you recognize each feeling and accept it, you will be able to work through the feeling and heal your emotional distress.

In the middle of your busy life, it can be hard to fully grieve a loss. There can be some obstacles to grieving. These may include having to return to work or school too soon after a loss, having no formal way to express your grief, or not being able to take part in a ritual or ceremony to express your grief. If you find that these or other things make it hard for you to function after a loss, talk to a counselor, attend a bereavement support group, or both.

### How can you manage your grief?

#### Identify your feelings

Sometimes after a loss, it is hard to figure out exactly what you are feeling. You may have several feelings at the same time or conflicting feelings, such as sadness and relief. Writing is a good way to identify what you are feeling. Writing about what you feel can:

- **Stimulate thinking** and help you organize and analyze your thoughts.

- **Deepen your understanding** of a situation and may help you get in touch with feelings you didn't realize you had.
- **Prompt you to reflect** on what is happening to you. This can help you put things into perspective and understand how the changes affect your life.

When you are ready:

- Set aside time to write.
- Choose a private, comfortable place to do your writing.
- Choose a method of writing. You may choose to write a letter to your loved one, for example, or a poem or story.
- Don't worry about how well you write. Write about everyday events or conversations you have had.
- Write what you feel. Don't screen your thoughts. Give yourself permission to write whatever comes to mind.

You can express your feelings in other ways too. You can make a collage or memory book, or you can paint or draw your grief.

### **Accept your feelings**

- Talk with people about how you are feeling. If you are having trouble talking about your feelings with family members and friends,

consider joining a bereavement support group or talking with a member of the clergy.

- Express your emotions. Expressing yourself can be very healthy and is not a sign of weakness.
- Be patient and kind to yourself. Your feelings may be unpredictable and uncomfortable. Remind yourself that these feelings are expected and will fade as time goes on.

### **Take care of yourself**

- **Give yourself permission to do nothing.** Set aside time to sit quietly and reflect on your loss.
- **Get enough sleep,** eat a balanced diet, and try to get some activity during the day.
- **Comfort yourself.** Allow yourself to be comforted by familiar surroundings and personal items that you value. Special items, such as photos or a loved one's favorite shirt, may also give you comfort. Treat yourself to something you enjoy, such as a massage.
- **Connect with loved ones.** You may feel lonely and separate from other people when you're grieving. But being around loved ones and talking about your feelings and concerns may help you feel more connected with others.
- **Ask for help.** Let people take over some of your responsibilities.