



Understanding Grief & Loss

Grief is experienced on many levels. We know that grief can be responsible for physical symptoms such as trouble sleeping, changes in appetite, fatigue or actual illness. Grief affects the way our minds work - how we see the world and ourselves. During times of loss it's the filter through which we receive information and make decisions.

The most obvious effects of grief are on our feelings. Almost all emotions can be part of a grief reaction, and they may be experienced with dizzying speed and intensity. Fear, anger, relief, despair, peace, guilt, numbness, agitation, and a seemingly bottomless sorrow may all be part of our grief. There is no order or scale by which to measure these emotions. There is no time limit on grief.

If faith is a part of our lives, it can be a source of comfort as we grieve. But we may also question how this loss fits with our understanding of God. It may feel like God has forgotten us or is not there at all. When we need it most, we may struggle with what we've believed for a long time.

While we wade through these thoughts and feelings, we must also cope with the world outside. We may feel angry that the world won't slow down for a moment and that it doesn't even seem to take notice of this awesome event in our lives. It might bother us when we see others enjoying life.

It hurts when others don't mention the loss - and sometimes it hurts when they do. We need some time alone to get our bearings. We may wish to regain our identity by resuming our routine, or even plunge into activities that keep us too busy to feel.

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

It's easy to see why grieving people wonder if they're normal. Our understanding of grief is limited, and each human being is very different. There's no right way to grieve, and no short cut around it. Grieving is not a weakness. It's a necessity. It is how we heal from our loss and move on. Grief may never go away but it will change. And we change, too. We are never the same again. We can find new ways of feeling, working and believing. The loss and its meaning become part of life and this new life can be healthy and happy.

- Be open and assertive with those struggling with their grief. People need understanding and compassion. Do not avoid the topic, it will be an uncomfortable feeling that lingers between you and the person with whom you are speaking.
- Grief is a personal and private journey for all people. We all experience it differently, and move through it at our own pace. Try not to compare yourself with how someone else is adjusting.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

If you have been carrying your grief to work each day, or if you're returning to the job after a loss, you may be wondering how you're going to get through this time. When a death is expected or has already happened, you might even wonder how you're going to get through the rest of your life.

You now have two jobs. You have responsibilities to your employer, and your job is important to you. But the work of grief is just as important. It can't be put aside or ignored - the only way past grief is to move through it. Grief is hard work and often-lonely work, but you can find comfort and guidance along the way. Consider these suggestions:

- Don't expect too much of yourself. Do things because you can, not because you should.
- Take control of seemingly small things: who to be with, when to write a letter, what to put off until later. When life seems out of control, we begin to reclaim it a little at a time.
- Important items can wait. The grieving period is no time to make big decisions, like selling a home or switching jobs. Give yourself time before you make any changes that will alter the rest of your life.
- Time is your friend. Make sure that you take time to rest, to be with people who support you, and to be alone with your thoughts.
- Decide that you will survive intense emotions. Don't turn away from painful sadness or anger because you're afraid of "losing it." Locate a quiet place and let yourself go; you can "find it" again.
- Pay special attention to your needs during holiday seasons or important anniversaries. Just when you're beginning to feel better, your grief feelings may come flooding back. Honor your memories and acknowledge the loss with traditions that recall happy moments. Be sure to make time to remember.



1 (800) 236-3231

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