



Grief and Loss

Fact:

Everyone experiences loss and grief.

Fiction:

It's a myth that recovery from grief is a continuous process. Anniversaries and other special events can reopen old wounds.

Prevention:

Loss cannot be prevented and grief should not be avoided or postponed.

Treatment:

Many resources are available to help the grieving person.

People cope with loss by grieving. This normal, natural response to death is not something to avoid or postpone, because grieving can lead to recovery.

Understanding Grief

A loss can make things more difficult by:

- Forcing decisions such as funeral arrangements
- Imposing new responsibilities, including legal or financial matters and the needs of survivors
- Making it challenging to eat, sleep or exercise
- Challenging the immune system, making the survivor more susceptible to illnesses or flare-ups of chronic conditions
- Experiencing anger, relief, shock, guilt, regret, longing, loneliness, depression, despair, fearfulness, numbness, fatigue, nightmares, anxiety, panic and even hysteria
- Increasing awareness of aging, mortality and death
- Causing forgetfulness and absentmindedness, and even interfering with physical coordination
- Creating distance from friends and family, who may not know what to say

Symptoms of Grief

Common physical reactions include:

- Decreased energy and extreme fatigue
- Loss of appetite (or in some cases, eating excessively in an attempt to fill a void)
- Anxiety that can manifest in hyperventilation or panic attacks
- Shaking or tremors
- Memory loss
- Specific aches and pains, such as headaches, abdominal discomfort, backaches, or a stiff neck that are unrelated to any medical problem
- Tendency to push oneself to extremes at work, school or in a demanding exercise regimen

Signs that the grieving person needs help include:

- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Trouble sleeping or relaxing

- Difficulty concentrating at work
- Avoiding people
- Staying emotionally numb
- Severe depression
- Suicidal thoughts

Stages of Grief

Everyone experiences grief in their own way but author and grief expert Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross describes five stages of grief. Sometimes people get stuck in one of these stages. Their lives can be painful until they move to the next stage and eventually the final stage—acceptance.

1. Denial: Denying the loss, withdrawing from friends and family, and feeling emotionally numb may last a few months or longer.
2. Anger: Anger or fury at specific people, oneself or the whole world, sometimes with deep yearning for the person who has died.
3. Bargaining: Making bargains with oneself or God.
4. Depression: In addition to sadness and anger, the survivor feels numb, hopeless and helpless.
5. Acceptance: After the anger, sadness and mourning begin to wane, acceptance of the reality of the loss begins.

Who Grieves?

Each year, millions of people are directly affected by the death of a parent or grandparent, a spouse, child, or other relative, friend or co-worker.

Prevention

Because loss is part of life, no one can prevent loss, and it is not healthy to try to prevent grief.

Treatment

The bottom line to treatment is to be patient, understanding and give it time.

Approaches to healing grief include:

- Faith and spirituality along with comforting rituals, prayers, words or music
- Remembering and celebrating the life of a loved one, writing a letter, keeping a journal or making a scrapbook or memory box
- Changing routines for special events or commemorating them in a special way because these occasions may trigger loss and pain
- Doing something for someone else or for an organization
- One thing to keep in mind, if you have the option, is to avoid making major life changes for several months, until your life has begun to feel more "normal."

Help can also come from:

- Therapists or counselors
- Religious organizations
- Employee Assistance Programs
- A family physician
- Support groups
- Hospital or hospice resources