

What is this thing called grief?

Grief is a natural and normal response to a loss. It hurts to lose, but it helps to grieve. Grief can have many challenges and difficult experiences.

How do we experience grief?

Grief is a process that helps us adapt to change so that we can return to life with vitality and hope. Grief is more than a feeling. We experience grief with our minds and bodies. So do not be surprised in strong emotions as well as physical changes, and changes in thoughts, beliefs, and habits.

Common Feelings During Grief

- Shock
- Numbness
- Anxiety
- Disbelief
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Betrayal
- Emptiness
- Apathy
- Impatience
- Sadness
- Powerlessness
- Agitation
- Excitement
- Despair
- Uncertainty
- Shame
- Guilt
- Thankfulness
- Relief

- Loneliness
- Isolation
- Anger
- Strength
- Weakness
- Feeling uncared for
- Feeling disconnected
- Uselessness
- Helplessness

Common Mental Reactions

- Difficulties in concentrating
- Continuously thinking about the loss
- Thinking that the loss did not really happen
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Low self-esteem: feeling worthless
- Believing you were responsible for the loss
- Increased or decreased dreams
- Increased nightmares
- Thinking everyone watches you
- Thinking that you are different than everyone else

Common Physical Reactions

- Tightness in the throat-difficulty swallowing
- Shortness of breath
- Sleep changes
- Weight changes
- Tiredness
- Deep sighing
- Feeling weak

- Energized
- Muscle tension
- Temporary slowing of reactions
- Taking on symptoms or behaviors of the person who has died
- Increased sensitivity to sounds/sights
- Head/Stomach ache
- Increased activity-can't sit still
- Muscle tension

Common Spiritual Reactions

- Feeling lost and empty
- Feeling forsaken, abandoned, judged, or condemned by God
- Questioning a reason to go on living
- Feeling dislocated-as if you don't belong
- Questioning your religious beliefs
- Extreme pessimism or optimism
- Feeling the presence of the person who died in your life
- Needing to give or receive forgiveness
- Needing to give or receive punishment
- Feeling spiritually connected to what/who was lost

Common Behaviors and Social Reactions

- Searching for what was lost
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Withdrawing from social activities

- Being constantly active
- Clinging
- Excessive touching or withdrawal from touch
- Seeking approval and assurance from others
- Aggressiveness
- Overachieving-trying to be super good
- Underachieving-trying to be super bad
- Changes in grades at school
- Being preoccupied and forgetful
- Being confused about time and space
- Bumping into people and things
- Crying
- Blaming others
- Being apathetic-dropping out

- Shock, numbness, and disbelief
- Avoidance and retreat
- Resistance, blaming and anger
- Constant thoughts of the loss
- Jealousy aimed at those who have what you do not
- Anger
- Self blame
- Confusion and feeling disoriented
- Physical disturbance including exhaustion and changes in appetite and sleeping patterns
- Nervousness that includes pacing and fearfulness
- Sadness, longing and despair
- Reorganizing life, gaining new insights, learning new skills
- Increased awareness, understanding and forgiveness
- Feeling at peace with the past, wanting to be alone and quiet
- Increased sense of inner strength and competency
- Increased compassion and ability to listen to others
- Reconnection, resiliency, and hope for the future

What is Loss

Loss is physical

*It can be felt as an ache in the heart,
a yawning emptiness,
and a lead weight that hampers
each movement.*

Loss is emotional

*It is unyielding,
waves of tears
and violent undirected anger.*

Loss is mental

*Your mind can be overtaken
by self-defeating thought
and a lack of direction.*

Loss is spiritual

*You question the meaning of life,
the existence of spirit,
and your own purpose.*

Yet is through loss

*That we gain new meanings in life.
by embracing loss
we align with the rhythms and
cycles of ourselves,
our living, and our world.*

*Sydney Barbara Metrick
Crossing the Bridge*

Rollercoaster Cycles of Grief

ef has been likened to a roller-coaster, because it has many ups and downs. There are times when everything seems still, times when life chugs in slow motion, times when life stands still, and times when your stomach seems to turn upside down because everything seems to be moving too quickly.

different loops and cycles of the grieving process often overlap and blend into each other. It may help to know that others have traveled before you and have found their way back to safe ground. Here are some of the cycles they report: