

# Working through grief takes time



Grief is the normal emotional response to losing a loved one. As much as we'd rather avoid dealing with it, grief is important. It is the process by which one begins to accept the reality of loss and adjust to life without the deceased.

Working through grief can be a long and difficult process. According to the grief counselors at Hospice of Cincinnati, coping with grief is not "forgetting," but rather a process of acceptance.

Everyone grieves differently— there is no right or wrong way. However, our counselors say that the following tips should help:

- Acknowledge that you are in pain. If you don't face your grief, your wounds might never quite go away. Accept that the pain you're feeling is normal and a sign that you're moving toward healing and acceptance.
- Set limits. Right now, you are busy with the process of healing. It's okay to say "no" if you're not up to doing something.
- Reach out. If you need some alone time, take it (see #2, above), but don't isolate yourself. Get in touch with your support network, whether it be friends, family or clergy. Don't wait for them to guess what you need. Allow them to share in your sorrow or simply be there when you cry.
- Take care of yourself (and not everyone else). Do whatever you need to do to help yourself. Get some exercise and plenty of rest. Eat healthy foods and drink plenty of water. Take time to engage in prayer, meditation or guided imagery. Avoid alcohol and smoking. Consider a medical checkup to make sure your grief isn't adversely affecting your health— especially if you have any existing health conditions.
- Give yourself permission to do what you need in order to cope. Allow yourself to cry, laugh, or smile.
- Don't make major decisions while grieving. Grief clouds your ability to make sound decisions. If possible, postpone big decisions— such as moving, taking a new job or making major financial changes. If you must make decisions right away, seek the input or guidance of people you trust.
- Maintain a routine schedule. This is not the time to over-extend yourself. Try to go to bed and rise at your usual times. Eat your meals at regular times, and try to maintain other regular, daily activities (like exercise) if you can.
- Seek positive experiences. Surround yourself with positive people, thoughts and experiences. Play with children and animals. Watch movies and TV, and read books, that boost your spirits. Do what you've always enjoyed doing, if and when you feel like doing it.
- Take things one hour, and one day, at a time. Don't think about the days and weeks ahead. All you have to do is make it through the next 24 hours. Break your day into manageable moments.

Working through grief is long and difficult. Time helps, and it has the ability to make your pain less intense, but it might not completely heal your feelings of loss and emptiness. Accepting and embracing your new "normal" might help you reconcile your losses.

## Questions or Concerns?

Call Bereavement Services at 513-891-7700.



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# What is Grief ? And What Does It Look Like?

The word “grief” describes the complex feelings and experiences that naturally follow the death of someone close to you. Mourning is the word commonly used to refer to the public expression of grief.

Most people hear the word “grief” and think of it only in terms of how emotions are expressed – usually through tears and crying. But grief is far more complex. It can be experienced emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually.

Below are some examples of how you might experience grief. All are normal, vary from person to person, and you may experience just a few or many of them:

## **Mental:**

Forgetfulness and/or loss of short-term memory; confusion; denial; disbelief; disorganization; difficulty focusing on tasks or chores; obsession with the past; communication problems; sensing of the presence of the deceased; searching for the deceased; difficulty making decisions and solving problems; difficulty making plans and keeping commitments; difficulty in coping with significant events, like anniversaries and holidays; struggles in coping with changes in relationships.

## **Emotional:**

Shock; disbelief; panic; sadness; sorrow; crying; emptiness; despair; hopelessness; helplessness; nervousness; restlessness; worthlessness; anxiety; moodiness; denial; anger; irritability; rage; guilt; shame; fear; frustration; impatience; loneliness; relief; peace; bitterness; vengefulness; blameful; tears at unexpected times.

## **Physical:**

Weakness; fatigue; rapid heartbeat; increased blood pressure; increase or decrease in activity; tense muscles; decreased resistance to illness; increase or decrease in self-care; heaviness or tightness in the chest; nausea; dizziness; feeling flushed or feverish; cold or clammy skin; trembling; shortness of breath; headaches; constipation or diarrhea; dry mouth; tightness or “lump in the throat; aches and pains; change in appetite; change in sleep pattern.

## **Spiritual:**

Trying to “make sense” of the loss by questioning one’s belief system; questioning the meaning and purpose of life and death; finding comfort– or no meaning and emptiness– in religious belief and rituals; anger toward the universe or a higher power; feeling or searching for the presence of the deceased; feeling punished or rewarded; questioning the trustworthiness of the higher power.

Although grieving is a highly individual experience, there are many factors that can affect how you experience grief. This may include:

- Your age, gender, race, culture, beliefs, maturity, personality, temperament, coping skills and ability to comprehend what has happened
- The deceased’s age, gender, race, culture, beliefs and personality
- The relationship between you and the deceased
- The circumstances surrounding the death
- Your previous experience with loss and grief
- Your support systems
- The presence of other losses, crises and stressors

## **Complicated Grief:**

When your grief is so painful, long-lasting, and severe that you have trouble recovering from the loss and resuming your own life, you may be experiencing “complicated” grief. If you are still unable to move forward and are experiencing intense emotional pain a year or more after your loss, it’s important to seek treatment from a doctor or mental health professional.

Sources: Iowa City Hospice <http://iowacityhospice.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Characteristics-of-Grief-and-mourning.pds>



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