

Things to Know About Grief



Grief has no timetable. It may come in waves during the turbulent months of a loved one's illness and then intensify after he or she has passed away. Each experience is unique and deeply personal. Emotions run the gamut from sadness, anxiety and guilt to anger, helplessness and depression. You need not grieve alone; there are organizations ready to help you cope with your loss.

1. What is grief?

Grief is a natural, normal reaction to death of someone important to you. Human beings are wired to form attachments to others. Deeply significant and loving relationships can be formed, but we are also mortal so eventually people we care about will die and grief is the set of behavioral, cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual reactions people experience as a reaction to such losses.

2. How do I cope with grief? How long does it last?

Everyone grieves differently. There is no time frame for how long one "should" grieve or how long it takes to feel better. It takes as long as it takes for each individual person. There are many grief and bereavement programs that welcome and encourage you to call them at any point along your grief journey. Ask your clinician for a referral or contact a local community program in your area.

3. How can I help someone who is grieving?

Sometimes it is just enough to be with them - you don't necessarily have to say or do anything. Encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings. Ask, "Do you feel like talking?" or say, "I don't know what to say right now, but I care." Help them recall the good times and don't avoid talking about the person they lost.

Other ways to help:

- Help them clean out their loved one's things when they are ready.
- Assist them with shopping, cooking, writing thank you notes, even walking a pet.
- Prepare for difficult dates & times such as anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays.
- Most importantly, be patient and understand that grief takes time.
- Avoid saying things like "You should be getting on with your life." Everyone's timetable is different, and there is no "correct" way to grieve.

4. What options are there to help me cope better with my grief?

While support groups are not for everyone, they can be quite helpful in reducing the sense of loneliness and isolation grieving people often feel and can also help normalize the wide variety of grief reactions you might be experiencing by introducing you to others with very similar feelings. If you are unsure about committing to an 8- or 6-week group, some organizations offer one-time workshops such as "Newly Bereaved" that allow you to briefly experience what can happen in a group. There are also individual counseling, lists of suggested reading materials, and referrals to additional grief support programs and resources in the community.

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