

What is Grief?



What is Normal Grief?

Very simply, grief is the response to learning about a loss or change. You have just gone through a major loss and may be feeling many things or you may be feeling numb. There are so many feelings, physical sensations, thoughts, and behaviors that are common after a loss. Some of these could seem confusing, odd, or scary to you. There is no right way to feel, no right way to grieve. There is no true *normal* grief. Your grief will be as unique and individual as your relationship was with the person you have lost. You may grieve like other people you know or you may not. Some common experiences people report when grieving are listed below.

Common Behaviors

- sleep disturbances
- dreams of the deceased
- over/under eating
- searching and calling out
- absentminded behavior
- sighing
- social withdrawal
- restless hyperactivity
- visiting places/carrying objects that remind you of the deceased
- treasuring objects that belonged to the deceased

Common Types of Thinking

- disbelief
- preoccupation
- hallucinations
- confusion
- sensing the presence of your loved one

Common Physical Sensations

- hollowness in the stomach
- lack of energy
- dry mouth
- tightness in the chest
- feeling short of breath
- tightness in the throat
- weakness in muscles
- being bothered by noise
- feeling disconnected from yourself

Common Feelings

- sadness
- loneliness
- yearning
- anger
- being tired
- emancipation
- guilt
- helplessness
- relief
- anxiety
- shock
- numbness
- irritability

“What we have once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us.” –Helen Keller



Is It Grief or Something More?

For most people, the toughest part of grief is the first few months and many find that their grief lasts about a year or two. The intensity of grief pain usually gets less after about 6 months but that does not mean you are done, or should be done, grieving. Sometimes grief can be especially difficult and interfere with your life.

If you find that after several weeks your life is still greatly disrupted, you may want to think about reaching out for more support. Some of the following may be warning signs:

- You can't eat or sleep or you are eating and sleeping too much
- You don't want to take a shower or take care of yourself like you used to
- You've lost or gained weight
- You feel a general sense of guilt, self-loathing, or loss of self esteem
- It's hard to manage how you're feeling and you lash out at friends, children, pets, or yourself
- You're using alcohol or other drugs to cope or numb yourself
- You are struggling with unwanted thoughts or images about your loved one or how they died
- You can't stop thinking about what you could have done to prevent your loved one's death
- You avoid thinking about your loved one or places and objects that remind you of your them because they are too emotionally painful

For Help Finding Counseling:

If you have health insurance, you can call the behavioral health number on your card or use your insurance carrier's website to look for a therapist or counselor. You could also join a peer support group. Many churches and funeral homes host support groups that are open to everyone. If you need help with finding a therapist, counselor, or support group, a member of Bereavement Support Services would be happy to help you.

Sometimes, grief can be unbearable and cause suicidal thoughts or depression. If you are thinking about dying or have thoughts to kill yourself you can get immediate help. Call 911 or go to any emergency room if you have a plan to kill yourself.

You can also reach out to the following:

Suicide & Crisis Intervention Hotline (DBHIDS)

- 215-686-4420
- Free, 24/7 hotline

The Mental Health Delegate

- 215-685-6440
- Involuntary mental health commitments
- Mobile emergency team

Crisis Text Line

- Text "HOME" to 741741
- A free, national, 24/7 support for those in any type of crisis
- You will be connected to a trained Crisis Counselor

Philadelphia Warm-line

- 1-855-507-9276
- Available Monday through Friday, 4pm-7pm
- Talk with a trained Certified Peer Specialist

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Free, confidential, 24/7 support throughout the United States



References:
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