

Coping with Grief

Grief is a natural emotional reaction to loss. We generally think of grief as a reaction to the death of a loved one; however, it can also be an emotional reaction to a divorce, illness, or significant life change, such as moving.

Symptoms of Grief

Everyone experiences loss differently. The following are all normal emotional reactions to grief.

- ▶ Feelings of shock, anger, guilt, and intense sadness, sometimes all at once
- ▶ Difficulty eating, sleeping, and focusing
- ▶ Fear and anxiousness
- ▶ Physical symptoms, such as fatigue, nausea, aches and pains, weight loss or gain

Myths About Grief

There are many myths and misconceptions when it comes to grief. Here are a few.

Myth: There are concrete stages of grief.

You may have heard about the stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. People often feel that they must go through each of these steps in order to reach acceptance; however, everyone processes grief differently. Some people may “skip” steps, or linger on one for a long while. That’s normal.

Myth: If you don’t cry, you aren’t grieving.

Again, grief is different for everyone, and the way people outwardly express their grief varies.

Myth: Moving on means forgetting or ignoring the loss and pain.

Moving on means accepting the loss and accompanying pain, not getting rid of it. Grieving people learn to live with loss, not ignore it.

Dealing with Grief

While grieving is never easy, there are ways to cope with loss. Here are a few.

Find an outlet for your feelings.

Don't try to push down or ignore your emotions, whatever they may be. Find a positive outlet for negative feelings, such as exercise, journaling, or a hobby.

Get support from friends and family.

Lean on your support network, but recognize that many may not know what to say or how to help. In these cases, spend time with family and friends by going for a walk, watching TV, or just hanging out.

Take care of yourself.

Eat well, get plenty of sleep, and exercise. Spend time in nature, if you can.

Know that grief and depression are different.

Grief is the normal reaction to loss, and over time the feelings subside. If feelings of intense loss and sadness don't subside, a person may be dealing with depression and need to get help.

Read.

There are lots of books available to help people deal with grief. Go to the library, or go online and find a book that speaks to you.

Get professional support.

Sometimes it's easier to talk to a counselor or to people in a support group than it is to talk to friends and family.

Resources

The following resources can provide additional information and support.

- ▶ The National Center for Grieving Children and Families: dougy.org
- ▶ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call 1-800-273-8255 or text HOME to 741741