

Coping with Grief and Loss

Counseling and
Psychological
Services

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A Normal Process

There is no "right way" to grieve. Everyone's process is different, and usually comes in waves of different thoughts and feelings. Below are common responses to grief.

DENIAL & SHOCK

It may feel as though life makes no sense, or there may be a sense of numbness. This helps us pace our feelings, as your brain is only giving you as much as you can handle.

ANGER

You may find yourself asking "why them?" and "why me?" It feels unfair, and we sometimes direct our anger toward others. Underneath the anger is pain. Anger helps our pain find a sense of direction, which often feels better than feeling lost.

BARGAINING

Common thoughts include "If only..." or "What if..." There is the wish that the person is still with us, and that life would return to normal. We might think about what we can do to stop feeling pain.

GUILT

It is normal to think about what we wish we had done while the person was still alive. Or things we wish we had not done or said. The most important thing to do at this time is to forgive yourself and remind yourself of your humanness.

DEPRESSION & LONELINESS

Profound sadness, a sense of emptiness, feelings of isolation, and foginess. We may feel as though others do not understand, encouragement and support from others may not be wanted or helpful, which increases the feelings of loneliness.

ACCEPTANCE, HOPE & MEANINGFUL LIFE

This does not mean happiness or even being okay with the loss. We move toward accepting the loss and its impact. Remembering may start to feel less painful. We eventually start being able to look to the future again. We cannot recover what was lost, but we are able to make meaningful relationships and find meaning in our life.

Ways to Cope

Be patient and gentle with yourself. This is incredibly painful and challenging. You are in a healing process, which is never simple, easy, or smooth.

Allow yourself to feel whatever you are feeling. Your feelings are neither right nor wrong, they just are. The more you open yourself to them, the better you can process them. Avoidance only leads to those emotions being expressed in unexpected or unwanted ways.

Take care of yourself: rest, sleep, stay hydrated, eat regularly, and move and stretch your body.

Talk openly about your feelings with others who are supportive.

Turn to your religious and spiritual beliefs and community.

"Down time" (such as evenings and weekends), special events, holidays, and anniversaries are especially difficult. Make plans ahead of time to honor the person you lost, structure the day, or keep in touch with supportive friends and family.

Need more tips? Try journaling, writing your loved one a letter, look through pictures or videos, listen to music, read, join a support group, check out grief.com.

*If you become overwhelmed, hopeless, or start thinking of suicide, reach out to a professional.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255