

Normal Grief Responses

Because grief can be so painful, and feel so overwhelming, the experience is often frightening. Many people wonder if they are "going crazy," or worry about whether they are grieving the "right" way.

Everyone responds to grief in a unique way, and yet it may be helpful to realize that the following are **normal and natural responses in the grief process:**

Physical sensations:

- Tightness in the throat
- Heaviness in the chest
- Empty feeling in the stomach
- Lack of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Dry mouth
- Shortness of breath, sighing
- Lack of energy, fatigue
- Excess of nervous energy, restlessness
- Feelings of weakness
- Pounding heart
- Over sensitivity to noise

Feelings:

- Sense of numbness
- Sadness and crying
- Anger, irritability
- Guilt, self-reproach
- Loneliness
- Fear, anxiety
- Helplessness
- Vulnerability
- Depression
- Relief
- Mood swings
- Intensity of all feelings

Thought patterns:

- Difficulty believing the loss is real
- Inability to concentrate
- Preoccupation with the deceased
- Difficulty with decision-making
- Loss of time perception
- Confusion

Behaviors:

- Wandering aimlessly, looking for the loved one
- Withdrawing from others
- Increased dependence
- Assuming mannerisms or traits of the loved one

In addition, you will probably need to tell and retell the details of the loss and remember things about your loved one. You may find yourself trying to take care of other people, who seem uncomfortable with your pain, by politely not talking about your feelings. You may feel the presence of your loved one, and have vivid dreams.

Again, these are all normal manifestations of grief. You may be experiencing other symptoms that are not listed, and wondering if they are also normal; when in doubt, check with your doctor.

Journeying towards healing...

These are some things you can do that are helpful during this difficult journey:

- Allow yourself to feel your feelings. Many different emotions may arise. It's normal to feel angry, guilty, sad, or depressed after the death of someone close to you. Let yourself cry. If you're afraid of being overwhelmed by your grief, it can help to create some boundaries by setting aside a special time and place for feeling your feelings, looking at pictures, etc.
- Reach out to your support system. Allow yourself to receive support from family, friends, support groups, clergy, or a therapist. Find other people who understand. This is not a time to go it alone.
- Share your feelings of grief. Talk about your memories. Telling the story in a hundred different ways is a very important part of your healing.
- Learn about the grief process. Reading a book or an article can help you understand what you are going through.
- Keep a journal. Even if this is new for you, writing can be very healing. When it hurts too much to talk, write. Write down your memories and fears, your dreams and longings, your pain and despair. Later, you will have a record of your journey to look back on, to remind you of how far you have really come.
- Take care of your physical self. Do the best you can to eat balanced meals, get adequate sleep, and exercise each day. Getting out in nature for a short walk can make a big difference. And remember to breathe—taking full, deep breaths can do wonders for us.
- Avoid alcohol and other substances not prescribed by your physician. Although they may numb the pain initially, drugs and alcohol may prolong and complicate your grief.
- Give yourself permission to say "no." (try not to rush or take on new responsibilities.
- Be patient and gentle with yourself. Do special things for yourself, things that nourish you. Grief is hard work, and we all grieve in our own unique ways. Respect your individual grief style, and take good care of yourself.