

How to Deal With Grief

What is grief?

Grief is the normal response of sorrow, emotion, and confusion that comes from losing someone or something important to you. It is a natural part of life. Grief is a typical reaction to death, divorce, job loss, a move away from family and friends, or loss of good health due to illness.

Grief FAQ's

- **Grief is a normal response to loss**
- **There is no "right" way to grieve**
- **There is no set time for grief to "be over"**
- **There are many expected and unexpected feelings that come with grief**
- **When you are still, like at night or in class, you may have a flood of feelings**
- **It may be difficult to concentrate or remember**
- **YOU ARE NOT ALONE, but grief can make you feel very alone**

Some Normal Feelings and Thoughts

- **Numbness (no feelings)**
- **Deep sadness**
- **Anger**
- **Relief**
- **Nervousness or anxiety**
- **Appetite changes**
- **Stomachaches and headaches**
- **Don't want to show true feelings in public**

How does grief feel?

Just after a death or loss, you may feel empty and numb, as if you are in shock. You may notice physical changes such as trembling, nausea, trouble breathing, muscle weakness, dry mouth, or trouble sleeping and eating.

You may become angry - at a situation, a particular person, or just angry in general. Almost everyone in grief also experiences guilt. Guilt is often expressed as "I could have, I should have, and I wish I would have" statements.

People in grief may have strange dreams or nightmares, be absent-minded, withdraw socially, or lack the desire to return to work. While these feelings and behaviors are normal during grief, they will pass.

How long does grief last?

Grief lasts as long as it takes you to accept and learn to live with your loss. For some people, grief lasts a few months. For others, grieving may take years.

The length of time spent grieving is different for each person. There are many reasons for the differences, including personality, health, coping style, culture, family background, and life experiences. The time spent grieving also depends on your relationship with the person lost and how prepared you were for the loss.

How does grief differ from depression?

Depression is more than a feeling of grief after losing someone or something you love. Clinical depression is a whole body disorder. It can take over the way you think and feel. Symptoms of depression include:

- A sad, anxious, or "empty" mood that won't go away;
- Loss of interest in what you used to enjoy;
- Low energy, fatigue, feeling "slowed down;"
- Changes in sleep patterns;
- Loss of appetite, weight loss, or weight gain;
- Trouble concentrating, remembering, or making decisions;
- Feeling hopeless or gloomy;
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless;
- Thoughts of death or suicide or a suicide attempt; and
- Recurring aches and pains that don't respond to treatment.

If you recently experienced a death or other loss, these feelings may be part of a normal grief reaction. But if these feelings persist with no lifting mood, ask for help.

Risk factors are often confused with warning signs of suicide, and frequently suicide prevention materials mix the two into lists of "what to watch out for." It is important to note, however, that factors identified as increasing risk are not factors that cause or predict a suicide attempt. Risk factors are characteristics that make it more likely that an individual will consider, attempt, or die by suicide. Protective factors are characteristics that make it less likely that individuals will consider, attempt, or die by suicide.

Risk Factors for Suicide

- Mental disorders, particularly mood disorders, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders and certain personality disorders
- Alcohol and other substance use disorders
- Hopelessness
- Impulsive and/or aggressive tendencies

- History of trauma or abuse
- Major physical illnesses
- Previous suicide attempt
- Family history of suicide
- Job or financial loss
- Loss of relationship
- Easy access to lethal means
- Local clusters of suicide
- Lack of social support and sense of isolation
- Stigma associated with asking for help
- Lack of health care, especially mental health and substance abuse treatment
- Cultural and religious beliefs, such as the belief that suicide is a noble resolution of a personal dilemma
- Exposure to others who have died by suicide (in real life or via the media and Internet)

Protective Factors for Suicide

- Effective clinical care for mental, physical and substance use disorders
- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions
- Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide
- Strong connections to family and community support
- Support through ongoing medical and mental health care relationships
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution and handling problems in a non-violent way
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation

The following signs may mean someone is at risk for suicide. The risk of suicide is greater if a behavior is new or has increased and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change. If you or someone you know exhibits any of these signs, seek help as soon as possible by calling the Lifeline at [1-800-273-TALK](tel:1-800-273-TALK) (8255).