

Grief FAQ

What is grief?

Grieving is a normal part of life. It's a complicated emotional process that you go through when you experience loss. That loss is typically associated with the death of a loved one but that isn't always the case. We also grieve in a variety of other circumstances, such as:

- The end of relationships
- Retirement/loss of job
- Loss of home/living situation
- Loss of hopes and dreams

What are the stages of grief?

The most well-known model of grieving comes from Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. She outlines five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. It's important to realize that not everyone experiences these stages in the same way or the same order. Here's a brief characterization of each:

1. **Denial:** The initial reaction, where individuals struggle to accept the reality of their circumstance. Imagine denial to act as a protection of sorts against overwhelming emotional pain.
2. **Anger:** Feelings of frustration and resentment, feelings which may be directed towards oneself or others.
3. **Bargaining:** Characterized by "what if" or "if only" statements. There's a tone of desperation as individuals wish to reverse the loss they're experiencing.
4. **Depression:** As reality sets in, profound sadness does as well. Hopelessness, despair and mourning typically emerge as a normal part of confronting the permanency of the loss.
5. **Acceptance:** Lastly, acceptance of the loss, along with finding a way to move forward with life. Acceptance does not equate to the absence of sadness.

Are there different types of grief?

There are different types of grief, usually categorized by the nature of the loss. Some common types include bereavement, anticipatory, complicated or prolonged, and collective grief.

- **Bereavement:** The most well-known type of grief; it is associated with the death of a loved one.
- **Anticipatory:** When people experience grief before the loss happens (e.g., dealing with a terminal illness).
- **Complicated or prolonged:** Intense and prolonged grieving that doesn't improve over time. It involves persistent feelings of sadness, guilt, or an inability to move forward in life.
- **Collective:** When a community or society as a whole experience a significant event and respond with a shared sense of loss and mourning.

What possible symptoms should I be aware of?

Emotional symptoms associated with grief can vary widely. Not only that, but they may also come and go sporadically throughout the grieving process. Here are some examples:

- Sadness, tearfulness, deep sorrow, hopelessness
- Anger, frustration, irritability or resentment (directed at oneself or the situation)
- Guilt, remorse or blame
- Loneliness
- Numbness

Physical symptoms associated with grief can also vary widely from one person to the next. Here are some examples to keep aware of:

- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Digestive issues
- More frequent sickness

Cognitive effects of grief are important to watch out for, and some are more likely to be witnessed by family, friends and coworkers as signs or signals that someone may be grappling with grief. Here are some examples:

- Forgetfulness
- Inability to focus
- Indecisiveness
- Rumination

How long does grief typically last?

Grief does not have a fixed timeline. Healing is a gradual process, and it is normal for grief to continue for an extended period. With support, the intensity of grief usually subsides, and people find ways to adapt and carry on but there is no right or wrong expression when it comes to the amount of time it takes to do so. It is important to note that grief can resurface for years or even decades to come. Grief can be triggered by situations, memories, during holidays, or anniversaries associated with the loss/trauma.

How do I get through it?

There are many positive ways to cope with grief. Creating rituals to remember loved ones, engaging in creative expressions, or joining support groups are all healthy outlets. Honoring the memory of loved ones, whether through acts of remembrance, volunteerism, philanthropy, or simply carrying on their values and traditions can often provide the necessary meaningfulness or sense of purpose to carry on with everyday life. The best advice for getting through the grieving process might just be to *take care of yourself*. Attending to your physical, emotional, and spiritual health will allow you to move through the grieving process naturally.

How can I support someone else with their grieving process?

Remember, the grieving process is different for everyone. Refrain from making assumptions or believing you know what's best for someone else. Instead, offering kindness, compassion, and respect for their process is likely to provide the type of comfort and assistance you intend. Here are some tips:

- **Listen:** Be an empathetic listener. Allow for the expression of feelings, thoughts, and memories without judgment.
- **Dismiss expectations:** Remember, everyone copes differently. Avoid suggesting that anyone *move on* or *just get over it*, and don't put a positive spin on their loss.
- **Be patient:** The grieving process is not linear. Offer ongoing support if possible.
- **Be practical:** Assisting with cooking, cleaning, or running errands can bring welcomed relief to someone overwhelmed with grief.
- **Respect boundaries:** Refrain from imposing your presence into someone else's life. Instead, just let them know that you're available when they're ready to connect.
- **Check in:** Connecting periodically can reduce the feeling of isolation experienced by the aggrieved. Stay in touch in a way that feels meaningful for everyone.

Everyone's grief journey is unique. Whether you seek a greater understanding of your own process, or confidence in your ability to offer meaningful support, be patient, kind, and open to the individuality of each of our grief experiences.

Explore more [Real Goals and supplemental resources](#)

For help translating or understanding this, please call (800) 635-9233. (TTY dial 711)