



A safe, private place to get doctor-approved information on health, emotions, and life.

Death and Grief

What Is Grief?

Grief is the reaction we have in response to a death or loss. Grief can affect our body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

People might notice or show grief in several ways:

- **Physical reactions:** These might be things like changes in appetite or sleep, an upset stomach, tight chest, crying, tense muscles, trouble relaxing, low energy, restlessness, or trouble concentrating.
- **Frequent thoughts:** These may be happy memories of the person who died, worries or regrets, or thoughts of what life will be like without the person.
- **Strong emotions:** For example, sadness, anger, guilt, despair, relief, love, or hope.
- **Spiritual reactions:** This might mean finding strength in faith, questioning religious beliefs, or discovering spiritual meaning and connections.

When people have these reactions and emotions, we say they're grieving.

The Grieving Process

Grief is a *reaction* to loss, but it's also the name we give to the *process of coping* with the loss of someone who has died. **Grief is a healthy process of feeling comforted, coming to terms with a loss, and finding ways to adapt.**

Getting over grief doesn't mean forgetting about a person who has died. Healthy grief is about finding ways to remember loved ones and adjust to life without them present.

People often experience grief reactions in "waves" that come and go. Often, grief is most intense soon after someone has died. But some people don't feel their grief right away. They may feel numbness, shock, or disbelief. It can take time for the reality to sink in that the person is gone.

Grief Rituals

Rituals, like memorial services and funerals, allow friends and family to get together to support and comfort the people most affected by the loss. These activities can help people get through the first days after a death and honor the person who died.

People might spend time together talking and sharing memories about their loved one. This may continue for days or weeks following the loss as friends and family bring food, send cards, or stop by to visit.

Many times, people show their emotions during this time, like crying. But sometimes people can be so shocked or overwhelmed by the death that they don't show any emotion right away — even though the loss is very hard. People might smile and talk with others at a funeral as if nothing happened, but they're still sad. Being among other mourners can be a comfort, reminding us that some things will stay the same.

When the rituals end, some people might think they should be over their grief. But often the grief process is just beginning. People may go back to their normal activities but find it hard to put their heart into everyday things. Although they may not talk about their loss as much, the grieving process continues.

Feeling Better

If someone you know has died, it's natural to keep having feelings and questions for a while. It's also natural to begin to feel a bit better. A lot depends on how a loss affects your life.

It's OK to feel grief for days, weeks, or even longer. How intensely you feel grief can be related to things like whether the loss was sudden or expected, or how close you felt to the person who died. Every person and situation is different.

Feeling better usually happens gradually. At times, it might feel like you'll never recover. **The grieving process takes time, and grief can be more intense at some times than others.**

As time goes on, reminders of the person who has died can intensify feelings of grief. At other times, it might feel as if grief is in the background of your normal activities, and not on your mind all the time.

As you do things you enjoy and spend time with people you feel good around, you can help yourself feel better. Grief has its own pace. Every situation is different. How much grief you feel or how long it lasts isn't a measure of how important the person was to you.

Helping Yourself

If you're grieving, it can help to express your feelings and get support, take care of yourself, and find meaning in the experience.

Express Feelings and Find Support

Take a moment to notice how you've been feeling and reacting. Try to put it into words. Write about what you're feeling and the ways you're reacting to grief. Notice how it feels to think about and write about your experience.

Think of someone you can share your feelings with, someone who will listen and understand. Find time to talk to that person about what you're going through and how the loss is affecting you. Notice how you feel after sharing and talking.

We can learn a lot from the people in our lives. Even when you don't feel like talking, it can help just to be with others who also loved the person who died. When family and friends get together, it helps people feel less isolated in the first days and weeks of their grief. Being with others helps you, and your presence — and words — can support them, too.

Find Meaning

We can learn from loss and difficult experiences. Think about what you've discovered about yourself, about others, or about life as a result of going through this loss. To help get started, you can try writing down answers to these questions:

- What did the person mean to you?
- What did you learn from him or her?
- What good has come from this difficult experience?
- What have you learned about yourself, other people, or life?
- Are there things you appreciate more?
- Who are the people who have been there for you? Were they the people you expected? What have you learned about them?
- In what ways have you grown or matured based on this experience?

Take Care of Yourself

The loss of someone close to you can be stressful. Take care of yourself in small but important ways:

- **Sleep.** Sleep is healing for both body and mind, but grief can disrupt sleep patterns. Focus on building healthy sleep habits, like going to bed at the same time each night or establishing bedtime routines like doing gentle yoga or breathing exercises.
- **Exercise.** Exercise can help your mood. It may be hard to get motivated when you're grieving, so modify your usual routine if you need to. Even a gentle walk outdoors can help to reset your perspective on things.
- **Eat right.** You may feel like skipping meals or you may not feel hungry. Your body still needs nutritious foods, though. Avoid overeating, loading up on junk foods, or using alcohol to "soothe" your grief.

Grief is a normal emotion. It can help to know that you will always remember the person you lost, but you can feel better with time.

Reviewed by: KidsHealth Medical Experts

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