



Types of Grief and Loss

Loss is a natural part of life. Coping with feelings of grief (<https://www.caringinfo.org/planning/grief-and-loss/understanding-grief-and-loss/>) that come with loss is slow, hard work. Most people feel strengthened, encouraged and supported when they learn about grief, understand how it affects them, identify coping strategies and learn ways to help themselves through the grief experience.

It is healing to experience your grief and acknowledge your loss. In time, your pain will ease. It is essential to allow oneself to feel all the emotions that arise, as painful as they may be, and to treat oneself with patience and kindness.

Here are some of the most common ways that people experience grief:

- Feeling empty and numb, as if you are in a state of shock.
- Physical responses such as nausea, trouble breathing, crying, confusion, lack of energy, dry mouth, or changes in sleeping and eating patterns.
- Anger—at a situation, a person or in general.
- Guilt about what you did or did not do.
- Withdrawal from family, friends and common activities.
- Difficulty focusing, working or making decisions.
- Questions about faith or spirituality; challenges to the meaning, value and purpose you find in life.

The grief that comes when someone you love dies might be familiar to most people, but there are other ways to experience grief and loss.

Anticipatory Grief

When a person or family is expecting death, it is normal to begin to anticipate how you will react and cope when that person eventually dies. You may find that you will try to envision your life without that person and think about how you will feel in the future, which may include grief reactions and ways you will mourn and adjust after the death of a loved one.

Anticipatory grief – also known as anticipatory mourning – includes feelings of loss, concern for the dying person, balancing conflicting demands, and preparing for death. Anticipatory mourning is a natural process that enables you and other members of your inner circle time to slowly prepare for the reality of the loss. As you prepare for the death of someone you care about, you may find you are able to complete unfinished “business” with the dying person (for example, saying “good-bye,” “I love you,” “I forgive you” or “forgive me”).

Sudden Loss

Grief that comes after a sudden, unexpected death is different from anticipatory grief. Sudden, unexpected loss may exceed your coping abilities, which often results in feelings of being overwhelmed and/or unable to function. This is perfectly normal.

Even though you may be able to acknowledge that this loss has occurred, the full impact of loss may take much longer to fully understand than in the case of an expected loss that might come after a prolonged illness.

Complicated Grief

There are times when grief does not progress as expected; the intensity and duration of grief is prolonged and dramatically interferes with you or a loved one's ability to function. Symptoms of depression and anxiety may be strong and continue for a while. Thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and reactions may seem to persist over long periods of time with little change or improvement.

In these situations where the grief has continued without subsiding, it is important to seek help from a qualified professional who can assess your individual situation and make recommendations that will help. It is important to seek help; complicated grief does not subside on its own.

Traumatic Loss

Everyone has been affected in some way by tragedies that have occurred in recent years, from the events on September 11, 2001, natural disasters including hurricanes, tsunamis and earthquakes to mass shootings. Many people have been touched by these events at a deep, human level. The ranges of emotions you experience are normal reactions to very unusual and abnormal events. If you feel apprehensive, confused, or uncertain, it is probably related to the fact that these were very frightening events. These feelings are normal. Understand that you may continue to experience unusual thoughts or feelings for weeks and even months after a scary event or disaster. If you find that you are unable to return to the way you felt before the tragic event, it is perfectly normal to seek out support.

Finding Support

Your local community hospice can be a source of information to help you or a loved one cope with grief and loss or to find other community resources that may be helpful. You may get help finding one at [NHPCO.org](https://www.nhpco.org) (<https://www.nhpco.org/find-a-care-provider/>).

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