

Bereavement and Grief

FACT SHEET FOR SURVIVORS OF LOSS

COPING WITH GRIEF

Grief is the physical, mental, and emotional response that comes from losing someone or something important to you. It can be a reaction to death, divorce, natural and human-caused disasters, traumatic events, loss of health due to illness, or other situations. This adult-focused fact sheet will focus on the grief that comes from learning to live with a loss of a life. It contains information about the grief response, methods to cope with grief, and when and how someone might get more help.

HOW LONG DOES GRIEF LAST?

Grief is different for everyone – some even say as unique as a fingerprint - and there is no specific time frame for how long people grieve. For many people, the most intense feelings of grief will lessen gradually and begin to improve within about six months. Feelings of grief often continue to come in waves. They might arise with reminders of the person who passed away or at times, without any clear reason.

For some people, grief may become more intense over time, especially if the loss was associated with a traumatic or sudden event. People can have extraordinarily intense and/or long-lasting grief or grief responses that last over a year that impact their everyday life. In these situations, they should consider getting help from a mental health professional as this can be a symptom of a condition called Prolonged Grief Disorder. They may also be having symptoms of another mental health condition.

COMMON GRIEF REACTIONS

Grief is a common and a normal part of the human experience that is unique to everyone. It's different from person to person and based on many factors such as social, cultural, and someone's beliefs about death. After a loss, people have a wide range of responses and feelings such as the ones below and many more:

- ▶ Sadness
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Emptiness and/or numbness
- ▶ Unexplained physical discomfort such as headaches, stomachaches, and/or muscle pain
- ▶ Fatigue and/or lack of sleep
- ▶ Appetite changes
- ▶ The inability to think about anything other than the person who died
- ▶ Deep loneliness and longing for the person who died
- ▶ The belief that one is communicating with or seeing the person who died
- ▶ Relief



LEARNING TO LIVE WITH LOSS

Over time as someone navigates their personal experience with grief, they may gradually also begin to have a different view of the loss of life and cope in a positive manner through ways such as:

- ▶ Having a better understanding and acceptance of the loss and one's personal grief experience
- ▶ Having an increased sense of gratitude and appreciation for life, relationships, and/or possibly other things
- ▶ Participating in activities to honor the deceased

IT'S OKAY TO ASK FOR HELP

If you have experienced a loss, consider reaching out for help, especially if you feel overwhelmed by grief. Sometimes people have potentially dangerous thoughts or feelings when they grieve like not wanting to be alive or thoughts of hurting themselves or other people. That's when reaching out to a trained professional can be very important.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Text or call 988 or chat 988lifeline.org.

Find Support

To learn how to get support for mental health, drug, and alcohol issues, visit [FindSupport.gov](https://findsupport.gov).

Find Treatment

To locate treatment facilities or providers, visit [FindTreatment.gov](https://findtreatment.gov) or call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 800-662-HELP (4357).

WHAT CAN SURVIVORS DO TO COPE WITH GRIEF?

Everyone copes differently. What may help someone might not be helpful to another or may even be harmful to another person. Consider these ways to cope:

- ▶ Express inward feelings outwardly, like through crying
- ▶ Accept and express a mix of feelings that may come all at once or change quickly like feelings of peace or joy as well as sadness
- ▶ Talk with close friends, family, or others you trust
- ▶ Meet with faith leaders, grief counselors, or other professionals who can offer assistance
- ▶ Join a professional or peer grief support group
- ▶ Write in a journal
- ▶ Express yourself through art
- ▶ Reflect on faith, religious, spiritual, and/or other personal beliefs
- ▶ Meditate or pray
- ▶ Find ways to honor the memory of the one who has died
- ▶ Eat healthy foods and/or exercise
- ▶ Spend time in nature
- ▶ Participate in a healthy hobby

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

SAMHSA's mission is to lead public health and service delivery efforts that promote mental health, prevent substance misuse, and provide treatments and supports to foster recovery while ensuring equitable access and better outcomes.