

What is Grief and Loss?

Grief is a complex emotional response to a significant loss or change in one's life; it is also a natural and universal human experience, characterized by a range of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Loss refers to the experience of being separated from something or someone important in one's life, either temporarily or permanently.

What grief is not

There are several common myths and misconceptions surrounding grief that can sometimes make it more difficult to navigate. Here are a few:

Myth: Grief follows a linear, step-by-step process with a clear endpoint.

Reality: Grief is a highly individual and unique experience that does not follow a specific pattern or timeline. It can involve a mix of emotions that come and go over time, and healing may be an ongoing process.

Myth: There is a 'right' way to grieve.

Reality: Everyone's experience of grief is different, and there is no one "right" way to grieve. Each person needs to find their own path to healing and accept that grief may look different from one person to another.

Myth: Grief should last for a specific amount of time.

Reality: Grief does not follow a specific timeline, and there is no predetermined amount of time that grief should last. Some people may heal more quickly than others, while others may experience grief for extended periods.

Myth: Crying is a sign of weakness or a lack of resilience.

Reality: Crying is a natural and healthy response to grief, and it can be an essential part of the healing process. Crying does not indicate weakness or a lack of resilience; instead, it is a way to express and process emotions related to loss.

Myth: People should avoid talking about their loved ones who have passed away. **Reality**: It is often helpful to share memories and stories about loved ones who have passed away. This can help individuals feel connected to their loved ones and may provide comfort and healing during the grieving process.

Myth: Grief should be dealt with privately and not shared with others. **Reality**: Social support can be crucial in the grieving process. Talking about grief with friends, family, or a support group can help individuals feel less alone and more understood as they navigate their loss.

Grief, an inevitable and universal human experience, manifests in various forms, each reflecting the complexity and uniqueness of the individual's relationship with loss.

Anticipatory grief includes the responses experienced prior to a significant loss. For example, mourning a loved one with a terminal illness, retirement, moving away, or finalizing a divorce.

Abbreviated grief occurs when someone moves through the grief process quickly and may follow anticipatory grief — usually because most of the grieving was done prior to the loss.

Delayed grief occurs when symptoms emerge later, potentially years after a loss. This can happen when individuals prioritize practical matters, such as funerals or caregiving, or when processing trauma from events like abuse, combat, or assault.

Collective grief emerges when communities unite in mourning significant events impacting a shared group, such as tragedies of war, school shootings, or natural disasters.

Complicated grief refers to an intense grieving process that significantly disrupts an individual's daily functioning. It can occur when a person has difficulty accepting or processing their loss and may require support due to the intensity and length of symptoms.

Cumulative grief is when several losses build over a short amount of time making the grieving process difficult and complex. (the loss of a spouse in a fire as well as the loss of a home).

Prolonged grief occurs when an individual's grief does not naturally progress or resolve over time. Instead, the intensity of their grief remains high, causing significant impairment in their daily functioning and emotional well-being.

Sudden grief is when the loss or death of loved one is unexpected or unforeseen. This can exacerbate feelings of shock, disbelief, and numbness, as the person has little to no time to mentally and emotionally prepare for the loss. (unexpected death, sudden illness or major life change).

Trauma-related grief is a complex response to loss associated with traumatic events, invoking intense emotions like sadness, fear, anger, guilt, and helplessness. This grief may result from situations such as violent deaths, natural disasters, accidents, or losses involving abuse, violence, or severe illness.

Loss, an inherent part of the human experience, presents itself in countless forms throughout our lives. By recognizing the various types of loss: tangible, intangible, and symbolic we become better equipped to navigate the emotional complexities that arise from each unique situation. There are some key concepts to grief and loss. Understanding these key concepts can help you normalize your experiences and offer a foundation for healing and growth.

Uniqueness - Grief is unique to each and every human being. It is a highly personal and individual experience, with no right or wrong way to grieve. Everyone's grieving process is distinctive to that person, influenced by factors such as personality, coping style, cultural background, and the nature of the loss.

Timeline - Grief has no set timeline, and the process can take weeks, months, or even years to unfold. While some people may recover from grief relatively quickly, others may struggle with persistent feelings of sadness and longing.

Growth & Resilience - Grief can also present opportunities for personal growth and resilience, as individuals navigate the challenges of loss and learn to adapt and move forward.

Reactions and Experiences - Grief and loss can elicit a wide range of emotions, thoughts, behaviors, physical sensations as well as spiritual responses. These responses can be intense and may fluctuate over time and can vary greatly from person to person, like you're riding a rollercoaster of emotional energy.

In her seminal work, On Death and Dying, Kübler-Ross (1969) originally developed the 5 stages of grief to describe how people facing terminal illness cope with their own death. It has since been adapted to describe in major aspects of grief in general. The process can be (usually is) complex. Grief is a multi-layered journey, encompassing various emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that are unique to each individual. Be patient, compassionate with yourself, and seek support when needed as you navigate this process.

In the upcoming pages, you'll find two exercises designed to help you identify the grief you've encountered and recognize the associated symptoms you may have experienced.

EXERCISE

Circle or highlight any of the following "common' states/reactions to grief that have impacted you in some way

EMOTIONS

Sadness

Anxiety Anger

Guilt

Denial

Bargaining

Acceptance

Despair

Loneliness

Helplessness

Shock

Disbelief

Confusion

Yearning

Relief

Hope

Gratitude

Resentment

Shame

Fear

Frustration

Isolation

Emptiness

Longing

PHYSICAL

Appetite Changes

Fatigue Aches Pains

Sleep Disturbances

SPIRITUAL

Questioning Beliefs, Values & Purpose Changes in Spiritual Involvement

BEHAVIORAL

Increased/Decreased Activity Levels

Self-Destructive Behaviors

Avoidant Behaviors

Increased Risk Taking

Substance Use

SOCIAL

Withdrawal

Concentration Difficulty

Loss of interest

Relationship Changes

EXERCISE

Circle or highlight any of the following losses that have impacted you in some way

Death of a loved one Death of a pet Infidelity Legal issues Addiction Adoption/orphaned Suicide Natural disasters Prejudice Depression/mental illness New baby or addition to a family Miscarriage Retirement Witnessing trauma or violence Loss of a job or financial security Loss of health or mobility - major injury, illness, surgery Loss of a dream or goal Loss of a home or community Loss of faith or spiritual connection Loss of a relationship (divorce, friendship dissolution, estrangement, absent parents) Loss of identity or role (empty nest syndrome, retirement, career change) Loss of a body part or function (amputation, paralysis) Loss of independence Loss of safety or security (trauma, abuse, violence) Loss of trust Loss of childhood Loss of hope or purpose Other

Understanding Grief

Grief is a complex process involving various emotional, physical, and cognitive reactions. Common experiences include sadness, anger, guilt, denial, fatigue, aches, and appetite changes.

Coping Strategies

□Validate your emotions - Allow yourself to grieve at your own pace.
☐Build a support network of friends, family, or professionals.
□Practice self-care: maintain healthy habits & engage in activities you enjoy.
□Express your feelings through journaling, art, or conversations.
□Cherish positive memories and celebrate your loved one's life.

Seeking Help

For further guidance, explore Apryl's "Longing Over Loss Workbook," "Longing Over Loss Grief Journal with Tracker," or consider therapy sessions for personalized support. If you're struggling with daily tasks, experiencing persistent distress, or relying on unhealthy coping mechanisms, professional help is advisable. To learn more or schedule an appointment, visit https://aprylgreen.com/

If at any point during your journey you find yourself struggling with harmful thoughts or behaviors, please know that help is available. Reach out to a mental health professional, a helpline call/text 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, (www.findahelpline.com),

