



## COMMON GRIEF REACTIONS

Grief affects everyone differently. Grief reactions may vary in time, intensity, and duration and may impact all areas of a person's life. Below are common grief reactions of adults. Though these are most common, other reactions that are not listed may occur as well.

### PHYSICAL

- Deep sighing
- Feeling weak or faint
- Muscle tension, aches or pains
- Change in appetite (increase or decrease)
- Increased blood pressure
- Sleep disturbances (more, less or waking more)
- Fatigue or exhaustion
- Rapid heartbeat
- Weight change
- Decreased resistance to illness
- Indigestion
- Headaches or dizziness
- Hypersensitivity to sights, sounds, smell, touch
- Dry mouth
- Tightness or heaviness in chest
- Hollow feeling in stomach
- Lump in throat
- Sobbing

### EMOTIONAL

- Anger
- Sadness
- Depression
- Denial
- Anxiety
- Despair
- Loneliness
- Feeling "out of control"
- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Guilt, including survivor guilt
- Numbness
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Fear
- Longing/yearning for loved one
- Bitterness
- Apathy
- Calm
- Relief

### BEHAVIORAL

- Forgetfulness
- Hyperactivity
- Outbursts of anger or aggression
- Blaming others
- Avoidance of people/situations
- Change in activity (increase or decrease)
- Neglecting oneself (hygiene, eating, health)
- Loss of interest in work, world events, social activities, sex
- Increased use of alcohol/drugs/tobacco/medications
- Acting out

### SOCIAL

- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Overly sensitive
- Attention-seeking
- Dependent
- Avoidant of people or places
- Lack of initiative
- Lack of interest

### COGNITIVE

- Short-term memory loss
- Difficulty concentrating
- Confusion
- Preoccupation with loss
- Difficulty making decisions, even simple ones
- Searching to understand
- Disbelief
- Increase/decrease in dreams
- Suicidal thoughts

### SPIRITUAL/BELIEFS

- Asking "why" questions
- Anger at God or other higher power
- Change in beliefs and values
- Loss or strengthening of faith
- Need to find meaning in the loss

## HELPING YOURSELF THROUGH GRIEF

*...helping children and families in their grief journey caused by death, divorce or other significant loss*

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**Keep a routine.** While keeping up with all that you used to do may not be realistic, it is important to create a new routine that you are confident you can maintain on a daily basis. What can you take off your plate right now that will allow you to feel less burdened or overwhelmed? Setting yourself up for success by accepting your limitations and setting boundaries is crucial while grieving. This new routine should include good sleep, food and body hygiene, time alone, time with others, self-care activities, and essential responsibilities such as caring for children and work.

**Create a plan.** Grief comes in waves, and these waves can be both expected and unexpected. Creating a plan provides reassurance that you know what to do when a wave of grief washes over you. Consider writing this plan down to refer back to in times of grief. Having this written plan will help when your thoughts are clouded or you feel overwhelmed with emotion. Here are some things to consider when creating a plan.

- What are some triggers that may escalate feelings of grief? (A place, song, smell, person, etc.)
- What can you do?
- Where can you go?
- Who can you talk to and/or cry with?

**Allow yourself to feel.** The only way to grieve is to grieve. While this can be difficult, it is important to allow yourself the opportunity to work through *all* the feelings associated with grief. Sometimes people fear that when allowing themselves to feel, it will be difficult to stop. Setting a time limit on how long to sit with your feelings can be helpful in these instances.

**It is normal if emotions and thoughts from previous grief resurface.** When we experience grief, unresolved feelings or reminders of past grief often arise. Although this can make grieving even more painful, remind yourself that this is normal.

**Engage in self-care.** Be sure to prioritize things that you enjoy, such as going for a run, taking a bubble bath, attending book-club, or doing yoga. Taking time for yourself by engaging in enjoyable activities has shown to promote healing.

## HELPING OTHERS THROUGH GRIEF

**Acknowledge the grief.** Let the grieving person that you are aware of the situation and can be supportive.

**Actively listen.** Support a grieving person by listening *without* interrupting, interpreting, evaluating, or offering advice.

**Empathize and validate feelings.** Let the person know that their feelings are valid and okay to share.

**Offer encouragement.** Encourage the person to engage in self-care, share their feelings, and feel their feelings.

## WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Grief can be complicated. While not everyone needs counseling to work through grief, sometimes the loss can create new struggles or complicate already existing challenges. Here are some things that may suggest further help is needed:

- Difficulties getting things done or keeping up with work.
- Feelings and thoughts are intense and uncontrollable, causing distress most of the day and/or causing sleep disturbances.
- The grief was caused by a traumatic event.
- Other unresolved grief experiences resurface.
- Needing a safe place to talk about feelings and experiences.

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