

## Grief and the Grieving Process

Grief is a normal and natural reaction to death of a loved one, often generating secondary losses as well. Grief can be compared to a raw open wound. With great care, grief will heal eventually, but it will always leave a scar. The experience of grief can be compared to enduring a fierce storm at sea.

Waves are peaked and close together. The sea becomes calmer, but the storm can regroup and strengthen without warning.

**How does grief affect an individual?** Some Physical symptoms may be changes in appetite, sleeplessness, oversleeping, and tightness in the throat, headaches, stomach aches, chest pain and digestive disorders. It is advisable to have a physical checkup to make sure these symptoms are not related to another cause. Be sure you tell your doctor you have experienced a loss.

**Other elements of grief may be:** Sobbing, fear, anger, guilt, lowered self-esteem, intense loneliness, resentment and ongoing distress over life's changes. The bereaved may have trouble concentrating, experience unusual dreams or nightmares, social withdraw, chemical abuse/dependency, become a workaholic or develop insensitivity. Thoughts and feelings of unresolved grief issues can be intensified by thoughts and memories of past losses in one's life.

**Expectations:** A time for grief may be part of the expectation of the bereaved, family, friends, or others placing added pressure on the bereaved. Everyone is unique in his or her own grieving style and processes of grief in a relationship to personality, coping skills, past life experiences and circumstances surrounding the death. One's spiritual/religious beliefs, support system or lack thereof in addition to financial issues can have a strong impact on grief processes. There is no timetable or correct way to grieve.

**People grieve differently:** Some people easily express their feelings and seek help from their social supports while others are more stoic and tend not to reach out. Childhood family expectations, role models, personality and attitude are all variables in handling grief.

**Other stressors may be:** Inability to have a farewell ceremony (funeral, cremation or other). Lack of or conflicts within a support system, poor coping skills, mental health or physical issues can all be ways one stresses over the grief of a loved one.

**What Helps:** Some strategies include writing, keeping a journal, artwork, and creative projects, utilizing spiritual practices, exercise, getting in touch with nature, joining a support group, or attending counseling if needed. You cannot determine exactly how you will feel or react to your grief. Grief is often referred to as "Grief Work", an ongoing process towards healing.

***Go gently and be patient with yourself. Seek help as needed.***



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