



## First-Aid for Difficult Emotions

*The whirling of grief inside us includes a wide range of personal emotions and reactions that continually change.*

In times of great loss, you may be confronted with unfamiliar or very intense emotions. A natural response may be to suppress these emotions, but sooner or later suppressed emotions take a physical and emotional toll.

Try this First-Aid plan for handling difficult emotions and, hopefully, they will lessen, and the healing can begin.

### Accept Whatever You Are Feeling

There is nothing wrong with any feeling you have, whether it is relief, envy, guilt, anger, or rage. Not accepting your feelings creates tension and an inner tug-of-war. Pay attention to physical cues. The first signs of suppressed feelings include a lump in the throat, a knot in the stomach, a tensed jaw, and sleeplessness.

### Identify Your Feelings

Try to be specific about what you feel. "I feel bad" is vague, whereas "I feel discouraged about the slow progress I'm making" is more helpful. When you name your feelings, you are less likely to feel overwhelmed by them. Common emotions after a loss include sadness, despair, loneliness, fear, relief, guilt, and anger.

### Do Something About Your Feelings:

- Cry—let the dam break.
- Walk, run, or go to the gym.
- Punch a pillow or smash ice cubes.
- Tear up paper or stomp on bubble wrap.
- Talk to someone who can listen without judging.
- Depict your feelings with crayons, markers, or paint.
- Write about your feelings, even if it's anger towards the one who died.
- When others have offended you, once you have calmed down, tell them how you feel. For example: "I felt hurt when you said I should clear out the closet."

