

Grief: What to Expect & How to Cope



There are many changes that occur in our lives that can trigger feelings of grief and loss. Most people go through more than one of these experiences in their lives. Learning to deal with grief is often difficult because no one likes to experience negative emotions.

Grief can be defined as intense emotions felt when someone experiences a loss that is significant. It is the process of working through the pain of loss, a functional necessity, not a weakness. There is no one way or “right way” to grieve. Grief and loss are experienced and dealt with differently by each individual.

Causes of Grief

- Death of a close friend or family member
- Relationship changes (e.g., divorce, marriage, birth of a child, child leaving for college)
- Life changes (e.g., death, pregnancy or loss of a pregnancy)
- Health changes (e.g., personal injury or illness, changes in family or friend’s health)
- Job changes (e.g., gain or loss of career opportunity, new work conditions or responsibilities, moving, retirement)
- Other changes (e.g., loss of income, financial readjustment, change in habits)

Grieving

Coming to terms with what has changed in one’s life takes varying periods of time. It is not unusual for grief to be felt over an extended period of time, even up to several years. Although each person grieves in his or her own way, there is a general pattern. Following a loss, you first may be stunned or distressed with the shock. You may have physical reactions such as sleeplessness, difficulty in sitting still or concentrating, loss of appetite, stomach upset, or even chest pains (which should be checked by a doctor). Often people can feel numb or as though they are on “automatic pilot”. They may do normal activities but feel disconnected to the real world. Memories of the lost person or object can produce overwhelming feelings leading to depression. Anger towards the lost person or object is common. Some may feel guilt about things they feel they “should have” done or said. Letting go of the pain not the person will aid in acceptance and healing.

Strategies for Dealing with Grief

- Spend 15 to 20 minutes alone every day. This time acts as a safety valve for dealing with any emotions stored up during the day.
- Be patient with yourself.
- Cry - rather than being an indication of weakness, tears are often a sign of strength.
- Find someone whom you can confide in, for example, a relative or friend.
- Do something special for yourself every day.
- Join a bereavement support group.
- Read books on grief.
- Keep a diary or write letters to express your feelings or as a way of saying goodbye.

Self Care

Self-care is important to prevent further stress to the body. The following have been found to be helpful in coping with grief:

- A regular daily routine. Have set times for getting up, meals and going to bed.
- A balanced diet. Include breads and cereals; meat, fish and dairy products; fruit and vegetables.
- Participate in outdoor activities and exercise.
- Relaxation: meditation, massage, music.
- Avoiding seeking relief through alcohol, smoking, medication and other drugs.
- Consult a doctor about physical symptoms.

Be patient, tolerant and gentle with yourself as you grieve. Call Deer Oaks, your Employee Assistance Program for consultation and confidential assistance.



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