

Coping with Grief

Coping with the loss of a loved one can be a very emotional experience. Whether it is a parent, sibling, friend or relative, losing someone who was close to you can feel overwhelming. While painful wounds often heal with time, there are some immediate ways to cope with grief and adjust to your loss. By identifying and accepting your feelings, finding comfort in friends and family, and not being afraid to ask for help, you can begin to cope with the grieving process.

The Stages of Grieving

Each of us copes with grief in a different way. However, many people experience some common stages of grieving:

1. Shock, denial and isolation
2. Anger, rage, envy and resentment
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

These stages were identified by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her 1969 book, "On Death and Dying." They can help many individuals understand the grieving process and identify their emotions.

However, it is important to note that the process of grieving is highly personal. You may experience emotions that do not fit neatly into any of the stages. Also keep in mind that not everyone experiences his or her emotions in a neat, step-by-step progression. It is possible to move between different stages at different times-- for example, going from acceptance back to anger and resentment. This is normal. Individuals should not feel pressured to make their emotions fit what they think they *should* be feeling. What is most important is accepting and identifying your feelings.

If a loved one's death is expected after an illness, family members may have anticipatory grief, which can shorten the process. More severe reactions typically occur after a sudden and unexpected death.

Common Experiences

It is normal for the grief-stricken to experience the following symptoms:

- Crying
- Inability to sleep
- Lack of interest in eating
- Difficulty in explaining feelings to others
- Exhaustion

- Irritability and uneasiness
- Confusion
- Fear of the future
- Anger (e.g., toward a higher power or toward the deceased)
- Sensitivity (e.g., toward a song or smell that reminds you of the deceased)

Depression and loneliness may set in following the funeral. Relatives and friends have gone back to their lives and may no longer be readily available to offer support.

These feelings should subside as time passes, as you come to accept the reality of the situation, and as you shift from mourning a loved one's death to celebrating his or her life and wonderful memories.

Grief Relief

There are many ways to ease the mourning process. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Do not hold back your feelings:** The emotions you experience upon first learning of the loved one's illness or death will probably have an impact on you immediately. The sadness you feel and the tears you shed are absolutely necessary to promote the healing process. Do not deny these feelings, whether privately or in the comfort of family and friends. Crying is a stress reliever and an endorphin releaser that will make you feel better. Talk through your difficult emotions with loved ones.
- **Express your emotions:** As a cathartic release, some people like to write letters to the deceased expressing exactly how they feel. Others take solace in their faith and the counsel of a religious leader.
- **Be a comforter and a listening ear for friends and family who are also in mourning:** It is natural to want to lean on others during this trying time. Be willing to let your grieving relatives and friends lean on you. This instinctual urge to be a caregiver can give you the strength and courage to better cope with your grief.
- **Honor the memory of the deceased:** In addition to displaying pictures of the deceased at the wake or giving a moving eulogy at the funeral, consider having a post-funeral gathering with family and friends in which photographs and keepsakes of the deceased are shown and discussed. Create a scrapbook with your children, or write a short biography about the deceased. Some survivors like to express their feelings creatively by painting a portrait of the deceased or writing a poem or song about the person. Consider launching a special fund or scholarship in the name of the deceased.
- **Get additional assistance:** You may choose to talk to a therapist or counselor about your feelings, especially if the sadness lingers. Perhaps you have unresolved issues about the deceased or things you wish you would have told that person before they died. Also, consider joining a support group for family survivors and mourners.
- **Consider taking a hiatus:** Aside from taking funeral leave at work, be prepared to give yourself ample time to heal and reflect. After the funeral, you may want to take a leave from your obligations and just get away for a short time, not necessarily to forget but to recharge and ponder the impact of the deceased on your life.

- **Get on with everyday life:** Give yourself enough time to properly mourn and reminisce but do not be afraid to return to normalcy. Just as the deceased would have wanted you to pay your respects and remember him or her appropriately, he or she would have wanted you to enjoy life and make the most of its opportunities. Go back to your family, your job and your everyday routines with the renewed commitment to do the best you can, and savor every moment.

While it is important to grieve the loss of a loved one, do not forget to cherish their life. Death is a sad occasion. However, remembering the joyful memories you shared with this special person can help during this difficult time.

Resources

- National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization: www.nhpco.org
- The Compassionate Friends: www.compassionatefriends.org
- National Organization for Victim Assistance: www.trynova.org
- American Trauma Society: www.amtrauma.org

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

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