

Understanding & Coping with Grief

Navigating the Grieving Process

The grieving process is an emotional, physical and behavioral response to loss.

It takes time to absorb the impact of grief. There may be an intensity and range of unexpected emotions or behaviors after a loss. You may not be prepared to handle such intense feelings. Part of the normal grieving process is experiencing an array of symptoms. Part of the healing process is learning those symptoms are a normal part of processing a loss.



Symptoms of Grief

Grief is unique to each person in its impact and meaning. The intensity of grief changes over time. The following symptoms are all common reactions:

Physical Symptoms. Physical symptoms of grief can include trouble sleeping, stomach aches, tightness in chest, exhaustion or fatigue, crying, headaches, decreased resistance to illnesses and muscle tension.

Emotional Symptoms. Emotional symptoms of grief can include feelings of shock, numbness, sadness, anger, anxiety, fear, guilt, panic, loneliness and depression.

Behavioral Symptoms. Behavioral symptoms of grief can include denial, forgetfulness, slowed thinking, listlessness, hypersensitivity, over-reacting, preoccupation and isolation.

Helpful Tips

Consider the following tips when helping yourself or a loved one to cope:

Be patient with yourself. Your body, mind and heart need energy to mend. You may feel frustrated or overwhelmed with the intense feelings associated with grief. You may question why they won't disappear. There isn't a specific timeline for grief. Be patient with the process; ask for and accept help and support.

Attempt to maintain your normal routine. Keeping a schedule will help build structure into your day to balance out the inconsistent periods.

Talk about the loss. Seek support from your family and friends. This often alleviates symptoms of grief and provides insight into your feelings about the loss.

Take care of your body. Eat regular meals, drink plenty of fluids, exercise and rest. Try to keep your body nourished during this difficult time, even if you make small meals or take short walks. Listen to your body and rest accordingly. Be patient with feeling "out of sorts." Grief is a process. Avoid using alcohol and drugs as a way to cope.

Prepare for holidays and anniversaries. These are often the most challenging times to cope with grief. Be aware of your reactions as an anniversary, holiday or special day approaches. Plan activities for yourself, create new traditions, honor the loss and surround yourself with supportive friends and family.

Treat yourself. Give yourself permission to take time out for you! Read a book, go to a movie or take a hot bath. Relieving stress symptoms, even if just temporarily, is important.

Speak with a doctor or a counselor. Don't be afraid to talk about what you are experiencing. A professional can specifically address your physical and emotional needs to help you work through your grief.

Understanding Grief: Myths versus Facts

Myth: If you ignore the pain, it will go away.

Fact: To truly heal, it is a necessity to face the grief and deal with it.

Myth: Not crying means you aren't sad or sorry.

Fact: There are many other responses to grief. Not everyone reacts to grief in the same way.

Myth: Grief should last about 12 months.

Fact: There is no time frame for grief process. It varies from person to person.



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