

Grieving the Death of Someone Close

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Grieving is a natural and normal response to loss. The death of someone close is, for most of us, the greatest loss we will suffer in our lives. Making sense of that loss and learning to live in the world without that person is the work of grieving.

The death of someone close is always a shock

It may not be a surprise, but it is always a shock. We cannot truly prepare ourselves for the loss of someone close. Anticipated and unexpected deaths each bring their own kinds of pain, but the worst pain is your pain and the worst loss is your loss. How you grieve will depend on many things; the kind of person you are, the relationship you had with the person who died and what else is going on in your life at this time.

Everyone's loss is different and everyone's grief is different

In your grieving you may experience feelings of shock, disbelief, confusion, sadness and loneliness. It is not uncommon to feel irritable and angry. The anger can be directed towards medical or emergency staff, God or even the person that died. Some people experience guilt and regrets about things they might have done or not done. There can also be a sense of relief, that the person's pain is over or that the difficult parts of caring are over.

Grief also effects us physically. You may find that your attention and concentration are poor, that you become absent-minded. You may have difficulty sleeping; you may have very vivid dreams when you do sleep. You may lose your appetite. Expect to feel out-of-sorts. Your body is trying to cope with the big changes in your life. Many bereaved people find that, at times, their loss and grief overwhelm them. They think about what happened, cry and want to talk about the person who died. At other times their energy is taken up with day-to-day events and trying to get on with their lives. This is normal.

You need time to mourn, and also time to adjust to a world from which this person is now absent.

Grieving is hard work

It doesn't follow any particular course or set of stages. Most people have good days and bad days; their grief ebbs and flows. Certain times of the year may be difficult or you may find your grief being triggered by certain memories or events. That is to be expected.

Grieving is about remembering not forgetting

People do move on from grieving in an acute sense, and most people find that the intensity of their grief feelings diminishes over time.

Death ends a life, not a relationship

The person who died is still important in your life. Try to find meaningful ways to keep a connection to them; such as lighting candles, looking at photos, telling stories about them, and including their names in everyday conversations.

Your life has been changed forever by this death. But you may find strengths within yourself you didn't know you had. These strengths can help you heal from the pain while keeping treasured memories alive in your heart.

For you as you grieve

- Realise and recognise the extent of your loss
- Try to rest, eat well and maintain some structure in your day
- Be patient and gentle with yourself
- Accept support; emotional and physical, from caring friends and family
- Allow yourself to grieve in the way that suits you
- Know that any new death can bring up sorrows about past losses
- Find meaningful ways to keep the memory of this person alive
- Be prepared for change and growth in your life

When to seek help

Because loss and grief are normal experiences in life, most people find their own way through the pain with support from friends and family. Some people find it helpful to meet others who have been similarly bereaved and seek out bereavement groups in their community. A small minority of people, for various reasons, can experience significant difficulties in their bereavement. Please consult your GP if you experience any of the following:

- Intense and unrelenting grief where your physical or emotional well-being is at risk.
- Serious and persistent thoughts or plans to end your own life
- Prolonged agitation, depression, guilt or despair

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