



Understanding Grief





What is Grief?

Grief is the reaction to the loss of anything important to you, including death, disability, divorce, experiencing a natural disaster, illness, job loss, and not achieving a goal. The way you grieve can be influenced by who or what you lost, how the loss occurred, personality, age, gender, stress, and your support system. There is no set duration for the grieving process as every individual and their situation is different. Symptoms of grief largely resolve after 1-2 years, fluctuating between the stages of grief in waves over time as opposed to a steady decline.

Stages of Grief

- **Denial:** Difficulty accepting the reality of the loss and life in general.
- **Anger:** After feeling disconnected from reality, you experience various emotions that help you reconnect; anger is the strongest one that gets you there.
- **Bargaining:** You want to restore life to what it was before the loss, which leads to a series of “what if” bargaining hypotheticals.
- **Depression:** You return to the present and feel intense emptiness and sadness.
- **Acceptance:** You recognize and accept the reality and permanence of the loss and continue to live in this world.

Types of Grief

- **Abbreviated:** The loss is replaced with someone or something new in your life.
- **Absent or Inhibited:** Not showing any obvious, typical, or outward forms of grief.
- **Anticipatory:** Expecting the loss of someone or something in the future.
- **Chronic:** Intense reactions to loss do not subside, causing distress.
- **Collective:** A tragedy affects a large group or entire community.
- **Complicated:** The grieving process does not move through all stages of grief.
- **Cumulative:** Experiencing multiple overlapping or back-to-back losses.
- **Delayed:** The emotional reaction finally occurs well after a loss.
- **Disenfranchised:** The loss isn't validated by others, so you hide your grief.
- **Distorted or Exaggerated:** A very intense or extreme reaction to a loss with self-destructive behavior.
- **Masked:** Physical symptoms or behaviors that impair or hinder normal functioning in life.
- **Secondary Loss:** When a loss affects several areas of your life.
- **Traumatic:** Additional trauma from a horrifying, unexpected, or violent loss.

What Can Grief Look Like?

Thoughts

- Disbelief in the loss
- Confused thinking or difficulty concentrating
- Preoccupation or obsessive thoughts about the loss
- Hallucinations of or sensing the presence of the deceased

Spirituality

- Losing direction in life
- Searching for meaning in the loss
- Questioning your religious or spiritual beliefs

Feelings in the Body

- Hollowness in the stomach
- Tightness in the chest or throat
- Oversensitivity to noise
- Feeling that nothing is real, even yourself
- Breathlessness
- Muscle weakness
- Lack of energy
- Dry mouth

Emotions

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt or regret
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Fatigue
- Helplessness
- Shock
- Yearning
- Emancipation
- Relief
- Numbness or lack of feeling

Actions

- Poor sleep patterns
- Eating too much or too little
- Being absent-minded
- Withdrawing from others or feeling less interested in the world
- Dreaming of the deceased
- Searching for or avoiding reminders of the deceased, including places and objects
- Sighing
- Restless overactivity
- Crying

How to Cope With Grief

Tasks of Mourning

- **Task I:** To accept the reality of the loss.
- **Task II:** To process the pain of grief emotionally, cognitively, physically, and spiritually.
- **Task III:** To adjust to a world without the deceased.
 - **External:** Explore how the loss affected your everyday life, take on responsibilities, and learn new skills.
 - **Internal:** Adapt to your new identity and understand how the loss affected your feelings about yourself and your abilities.
 - **Spiritual:** Unpack how the loss affected your spiritual beliefs, purpose in life, and views of the world.
- **Task IV:** To find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life.

How to Cope With Loss and Do Grief Work



Healthy Lifestyle: Sleep well, eat a balanced diet, exercise and do physical activity, and avoid using alcohol and unprescribed drugs for relief.



Get Support: Accept and ask for the help you need. Open up to family and friends you trust, and consider seeing a therapist, primary care practitioner, mental health professional, spiritual leader, grief counselor, or joining a grief support group.



Rituals: A ritual is an activity that is done to remember and honor the person who died, such as a visitation, wake, funeral, crafting with clothes of the deceased, or planting a memory garden.



Reading, Writing, and Crafting: Read up on coping with grief or get lost in the comfort of a good book. You can also journal about your grief or even channel your feelings into art, like writing your own book, creating a painting, or crafting.



Forgiveness: You might experience a lack of closure, unfinished business, or being wronged in your loss or by the deceased. This is an opportunity to work on forgiveness so you can move forward in life.



Nature: Spending time in nature is soothing, offers fresh air and Vitamin D, and keeps you physically or artistically engaged. Consider gardening, going on walks, or reading outside.



Massage and Physical Therapy: You might feel tension or pain in your muscles from holding onto grief, so consider getting a therapeutic massage or physical therapy.



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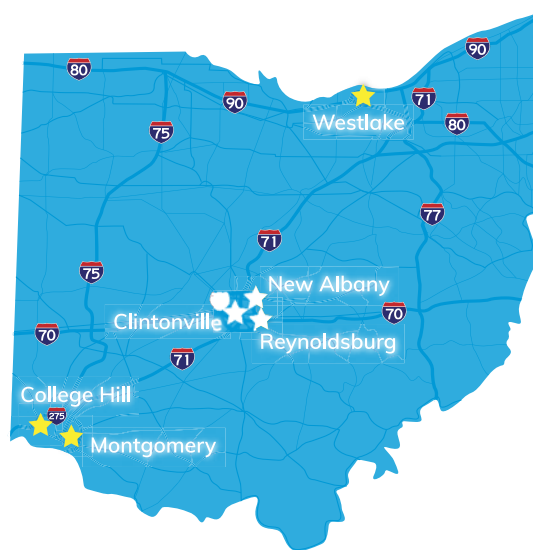
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