

Grief Relief

Everyone who loves is vulnerable to the pain of grief, for love means attachment, and all human attachments are subject to loss. But grief need not, should not, be a destructive emotion.

~ Dr. Joyce Brothers, psychologist

How long does grief last?

This is probably the most common question asked by the bereaved. Because every griever is a unique personality, there is no single answer to this question. In most cases, the pain associated with grieving begins to subside considerably in the second and third years following loss. This means that there are more good days than bad ones; that the heavy, depressive feelings in earlier months begin to break up with more hopeful, optimistic feelings replacing them. Many bereavement authorities believe that most grief adjustments take between two and four years to be completed. Of course, some adjustments are shorter and some are longer, depending upon personality factors and the nature of the relationship with the deceased.

What are the signs of grief?

On the emotional level, the bereaved experience some of the following: disbelief, shock, numbness, denial, sadness, anxiety, guilt, depression, anger, loneliness or frustration. The physical symptoms of grief can include tightness of the chest or throat, pain in the heart area, panic attacks, dizziness or trembling. Grievers also report sleep disturbance, as in either too much or not enough sleeping. All of these emotional and physical symptoms fall within the normal range of response to the loss of a loved one.

I feel like I am going crazy. Is this normal?

This is perfectly normal. Indeed, grief can be accurately described as a "crazy" time in one's life. In her book, *Nobody's Child Anymore*, Barbara Bartocci writes: *"The important thing to realize about mourning is that it's normal to feel slightly crazy. You will forget things. You will drive your car as if on autopilot. You will stare at the papers on your desk and feel paralyzed to get any work done."*

Bartocci offers this simple and practical advice: *"This might be a good time to carry a small notebook with you. Write down things you need to remember. Don't rely on your memory. Let your boss know why you're not functioning at your usual one-hundred percent. Be patient with yourself. Be as understanding of you during this time as you would like others to be."*

Will I ever stop crying?

Even though it may be difficult to believe, the tears will come to an end. This will not happen abruptly but gradually, and even after the intense crying ceases, there may be times when hearing a favorite song or seeing a favored place will bring a moment of sadness along with a tear. Keep in mind that crying is healthy because it is an emotional and physical release. Writing centuries earlier, Shakespeare had it right: "To weep is to make less the depth of grief."

Do all people grieve in the same way?

While many aspects of grieving are universal —feelings of sadness, numbness, confusion, depression — there is no single prescribed way to grieve. Grieving is an individual endeavor. Some want to have many people around with whom they can share and explore their feelings. Others prefer to deal with loss more

ISP (*International Suicide Prevention*) 1736 E. Charleston Blvd., #301, Las Vegas, NV 89104
Web Site: <http://www.SupportISP.org> Email: president@supportisp.org phone: 702-743-4340

privately. Most people report that grieving is much like being on an emotional roller coaster. It is worth noting that the "ride" down is usually the prelude to the "ride" up.

Do men and women grieve differently?

The cultural stereotypes of women and men in grief are inaccurate. Generally, they portray women as being expressive with their grief while men are the "strong and silent" type. The reality is that some men need and want to express and share their feelings, while some women prefer to do their grief work in a more low-key way. Bereavement styles have less to do with gender and more to do with basic personality traits. Grieve in ways that are most helpful and healing for you.

The holidays are coming. How can I cope with them?

It is not only holidays that are difficult because there is an "empty chair," but also anniversaries, birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day and so on. Here are some effective ways to manage these special days:

- Plan ahead. How will you spend the day? With whom?
- Talk about your deceased loved one. This will let others know that you want to hear his/her name and to talk about that person.
- Establish personal priorities. Decide what you want to do, how you wish to celebrate, and with whom you wish to spend time. Follow your instincts.
- Express your feelings. If the holidays make you more weepy, then cry. If you feel the need to talk about the loss, then find a good friend who will listen.
- Value your memories. You loved, and the price of losing a loved one is pain. Cherish the time you had together and value your precious memories, which can never be taken away from you.
- Reach out to others. Take the focus off yourself and your pain by volunteering to help others.
- Avoid isolating yourself in grief. Just because you are in pain, do not cut yourself off from others. Stay in touch. Keep communication open with family, friends and colleagues. Accept invitations for social events, even if you do not feel like it.
- Be patient with yourself. A loss to death inflicts a deep wound but the wound will heal.

I feel very angry. Why is this and what can I do with the anger?

It is not unusual to feel angry. Sometimes the anger is directed at the deceased love one, sometimes toward other family members, sometimes at medical staff, or sometimes toward God. The anger will subside, but you can take the edge off it through exercise, hard physical activity, such as housework or gardening, and by talking about the angry feelings.

What helps the grieving process?

Even though griever often feel helpless, there are important steps and actions they can take to make the grieving process flow more smoothly and toward a more rapid resolution. Here are some ways to cope with the pain of loss:

- Seek out supportive people. Find a relative, friend, neighbor or spiritual leader who will listen non-judgmentally and provide you with support as you sort your way through grief.
- Join a support group. Being with others who have had a similar loss is therapeutic. Express your feelings. Do this by confiding in a trusted friend or by writing in a journal. Feelings expressed are often feelings diminished.
- Take care of your health. Eat balanced, nutritious meals. Rest properly. Find an exercise you enjoy and do it regularly. If you have physical problems, consult with your physician promptly.

- Find outside help when necessary. If your bereavement feels too heavy for you to bear, find a counselor or therapist trained in grief issues to offer you some guidance.

I have an opportunity to relocate. Would this be good for me?

After a death, the temptation to make changes can be acute. Such changes can include selling off your home, taking a new position, or making a career change. Unless there is some pressing reason for the change, a good rule is to postpone any major change for at least one year following the loss. Grief authority Rabbi Earl Grollman advises: *"You may be tempted to make a radical change in your life—to sell your house, to move someplace different, to make a fresh start, away from your familiar home and all the painful memories. Wait awhile. The time is not right for major decisions. Your judgment is still uncertain. You are still in horrible pain. Getting used to a new life takes time, thought and patience."*

When is mourning finished?

Mourning is successfully completed when the "tasks" of grief are completed. In his book, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, J. William Worden, Ph.D., identifies the four "tasks" of grieving:

- To accept the reality of the loss;
- To experience the pain of the grief;
- To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing;
- To withdraw emotional energy and reinvest it in another relationship.

For those who seek a clear sign that their grieving is coming to completion, Dr. Worden offers this insight: *"One benchmark of a completed grief reaction is when the person is able to think of the deceased without pain. There is always a sense of sadness when you think of someone that you have loved and lost, but it is a different kind of sadness — it lacks the wrenching quality it previously had. One can think of the deceased without physical manifestations such as intense crying or feeling tightness in the chest. Also, mourning is finished when a person can reinvest his or her emotions back into life and in the living."*