



Dealing with **LOSS**

Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. You may associate grief with the death of a loved one – and this type of loss does often cause very intense grief – but any loss can cause grief, including:

- a relationship breakup
- death of a pet
- a loved one's serious illness
- loss of a cherished dream
- loss of safety after a trauma
- a miscarriage
- loss of a friendship
- losing a job/role
- loss of health
- loss of financial stability

Common symptoms of grief

Loss affects people in different ways. Almost anything that is experienced in the early stages of grief is normal – including feeling as if you are going crazy, feeling as if you are in a bad dream or questioning your beliefs. It is common to experience some of the following symptoms when you are suffering loss.

Shock and disbelief – right after a loss it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth.

Sadness – profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may feel emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.

Guilt – you may experience regret or guilt about things that were or were not said.

Anger – you may feel anger and resentment. Anger may be directed at yourself, God, doctors or a person. You may feel the need to blame someone for the loss experienced.

Fear – a significant loss can trigger worries and fears, feelings of anxiety, helplessness or insecurity and even panic attacks. The loss of a loved one can trigger fears about mortality, facing life without them, or responsibilities now faced alone.

Physical symptoms – we often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but it often involves physical problems including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains and insomnia.

“there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grieving is as individual as our lives.”

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Coping with loss

Getting support

The most important factor in healing after loss is having the support of other people. Even if you are not comfortable talking about your feelings, expressing them when grieving is important. You may prefer to express your feelings in writing or with the use of images. Sharing loss makes the burden of grief easier to manage. Support can come from different places. It is important to find the best support for you.

Take care of yourself

When grieving, it is more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you to get through difficult times.

When loss doesn't go away

It is normal to feel sad, numb or angry following a loss. As time passes these emotions should become less intense as you accept the loss and start to move forward. If you don't feel better over time, or your grief intensifies, this may be a sign that it has developed into a more serious problem. This could be complicated grief or depression.

Complicated grief

Symptoms of complicated grief include:

- intrusive thoughts or images of your loved one
- searching for the person in familiar places
- denial of the loss or sense of disbelief
- feeling that life is empty or meaningless
- imagining that your loved one is alive
- extreme anger or bitterness over the loss
- intense longing and yearning for person or thing you have lost
- avoiding things that remind you of your loved one

The difference between grief and depression

Distinguishing between grief and depression is not always easy as they share many symptoms. However, there are ways to tell the difference. Grief can be a roller coaster, involving a wide variety of emotions and a mix of good and bad days. Even in the middle of the grieving process people will have moments of pleasure or happiness. Depression tends to cause more constant feelings of emptiness and despair.

Symptoms that suggest depression rather than grief:

- intense, pervasive sense of guilt
- slow speech and body movements
- thoughts of suicide or a preoccupation with dying
- inability to function at work, home and/or school
- feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
- seeing or hearing things that are not there