

Dealing with Grief

The blog on our website (same title) has more information, especially in links-go to carnamentalwellness.org/blog

Generally, grief is defined as "intense sorrow", and typically results from the loss of something or someone. It usually refers to the death of a loved one, but grief can be felt for any kind of loss, including (but not limited to) the end of important friendships, relationships, or even jobs. Even though none of those things are directly comparable to each other, many people go through the same stages of grief for all of those situations.

First of all, however, I'd like to remind you that it WILL get better.

That doesn't mean you'll never stop missing them, however. My own mother unfortunately passed away when I was 5, exactly 12 years ago. The anniversary of her death is today (March 24th) and I wanted to write this packet to commemorate her. I'm hoping she sees me and is proud of how much I've grown and the work I'm doing (which, by the way, is following in her footsteps because she also did work in mental health). This past year, I experienced a sort of delayed grief as I learned more about her and got closer to her than I'd ever consciously been, all through my work and curiosity. Although I wish I had more time to know her, and of course I miss what I do remember and what I've been told about her, it's still possible to deal with the grief and move on.

This is not only true for me, but for everyone else. You're allowed to feel sad- to miss the person, wish they were still here, perhaps regret your last interaction with them or the lost time during a previous fight. But that sadness doesn't have to, and shouldn't, consume you for the rest of your life- it will eventually get better. Yes, that person is gone. But you are still here, and we can't take that for granted. We still have our lives to live, so go live it.

That being said, this stage of acceptance is only the 5th stage- first, you'll probably go through the first 4.

These are the 5 Stages of Grief:

- 1. Denial:** When you first learn of a loss, it's normal to think, "This isn't happening." You may feel shocked or numb. This is a temporary way to deal with the rush of overwhelming emotion. It's a defense mechanism.
- 2. Anger:** As reality sets in, you're faced with the pain of your loss. You may feel frustrated and helpless. These feelings later turn into anger. You might direct it toward other people, a higher power, or life in general. To be angry with a loved one who died and left you alone is natural, too.
- 3. Bargaining:** During this stage, you dwell on what you could've done to prevent the loss. Common thoughts are "If only..." and "What if..." You may also try to strike a deal with a higher power.

4. Depression: Sadness sets in as you begin to understand the loss and its effect on your life. Signs of depression include crying, sleep issues, and a decreased appetite. You may feel overwhelmed, regretful, and lonely.

5. Acceptance: In this final stage of grief, you accept the reality of your loss. It can't be changed. Although you still feel sad, you're able to start moving forward with your life.

So what can I do to help myself get to the stage of acceptance?

- **Give yourself time.** Accept your feelings and know that grieving is a process.
- **Talk to others.** Spend time with friends and family. Don't isolate yourself.
- **Take care of yourself.** Exercise regularly, eat well, and get enough sleep to stay healthy and energized.
- **Return to your hobbies.** Get back to the activities that bring you joy.
- **Join a support group.** Speak with others who are also grieving. It can help you feel more connected.
- **Face your feelings.** You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, [anxiety](#), substance abuse, and health problems.
- **Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.** Even if you're not able to talk about your loss with others, it can help to write down your thoughts and feelings in a journal, for example. Or you could release your emotions by making a scrapbook or volunteering for a cause related to your loss.
- **Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either.** Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.
- **Do things you know would make the person you lost proud.** This may be more helpful in some situations than others, but it can be super comforting to know that the person you lost would be proud of the work you're doing and the way you're spending the time that you still have on Earth. Do your best to make them proud and make yourself proud, while making sure to take care of yourself. We know it's a tough balance, but we believe in you! Check out some of our [other blogs](#) to learn how to find that balance.
- Identify exactly what emotion you're feeling (see below)

Certain specific emotions you might feel after a loss (hint: they're all perfectly okay and valid!).

Identifying how you feel is the first step in getting over it. Once you identify your main emotions, writing out how you feel using more descriptive words, as well as why you feel that way, can be a helpful tool in letting go of those emotions.

- **Sadness or depression.** This can be brought on at the realisation of the loss and may cause you to isolate yourself whilst reflecting on things you did with your loved one or focusing on memories from the past.

- **Shock, denial or disbelief.** It is natural for our minds to try to protect us from pain, so following a loss some people may find that they feel quite numb about what has happened. Shock provides emotional protection from becoming overwhelmed, especially during the early stages of grief, and it can last a long time.
- **Numbness and denial.** You may find that you feel numb after a loss. This is natural and helps us to process what has happened at a pace that we can manage, and not before we are ready. It is natural and can be a helpful stage - the only problem being if numbness is the only thing we feel, and none of the other feelings associated with grief, as this can cause us to feel 'stuck' or 'frozen'.
- **Panic and confusion.** Following the loss of someone close to us we can be left wondering how we will fill the gap left in our lives, and can experience a sense of changed identity.
- **Anger or hostility.** Losing somebody is painful and can seem an unfair thing to happen. You may find that you feel angry or frustrated and want to find something or someone to blame for the loss, so that you can try to make sense of it.
- **Feeling overwhelmed.** Grief can hit people immediately and with full force, potentially causing them to cry a lot or feel like they are not coping. People can worry that their feelings are so overwhelming that they don't know how they can live with them. But over time feelings of grief tend to become less intense and people find a way to live with them.
- **Relief.** You may feel relieved when somebody dies, especially if there had been a long illness, if the person who died had been suffering, if you were acting as the main carer for the person, or if your relationship with the person was difficult. Relief is a normal response and does not mean you did not love or care for the person.
- **Mixed feelings.** All relationships have their difficulties and you may think that, because you had a difficult relationship with the person, that you will grieve less or cope better. Instead you may find that you feel a mix of emotions like sadness, anger, guilt and anything in between.

When should I seek professional help?

Although grief itself is usually not considered a mental disorder/illness, depression can result from/emerge because of grief.

If you are feeling any of the following, please talk to your doctor, [find a therapist](#), or [call a hotline](#):

- Trouble keeping up your normal routine, like going to work and cleaning the house
- Feelings of depression
- Thoughts that life isn't worth living, or of harming yourself
- Any inability to stop blaming yourself

If you don't want to seek therapy or call a hotline yet, we'd encourage you to take a look at some of the resources (such as videos, workshops, and articles) at [grief.com](#). Most importantly, remember, you're not alone, and you will eventually feel better. You just need to stick through it and find something to live for, and you'll be okay.