

# HOW DO YOU HANDLE GRIEF?

Grief is the normal response to loss. It is painful and at times may seem almost unbearable. The death of someone you care about creates a myriad of emotions. Someone important to you is gone. Life is changed and it hurts.

Grief is the process that you go through as you experience the loss. How long and how intensely you grieve depends on your relationship with the person who died, the circumstances of the death and your situation as a survivor. You may grieve for weeks, months or even years. It will be different for every person.

Some people try to deal with their loss by denying the pain. But when you don't deal with pain, it stays with you and sometimes comes out in destructive ways such as alcoholism, drug abuse or severe depression.

## **Grief - Either You Deal With It or It Deals With You**

When you grieve, you have two choices. You can try to avoid the pain and hope to forget, or you can recognize the loss and seek healing. Avoiding the pain is not the best choice because grief, left unresolved, continues to cause pain.



## **Feel the Pain**

Let it wash over you. Remember that grief has no timetable. Emotions may ebb and flow for weeks, months or even years. Being stoic and “strong” is admirable, but may get in the way of healing.

## **Talk About Your Sorrow**

Find friends who will listen to you. Tell them you need to talk about your loss. They may not know what to say to you, but ask them to listen as you share your memories and pain.

## Forgive Yourself

It's easy to think of the things you wish you had said or done. It's also easy to feel guilty at the anger you feel while grieving. Let those things go.

## Eat Nutritious Foods and Exercise

Because grief is so exhausting, it is important to eat a balanced diet. Even though you may want to crawl under the covers, make yourself exercise. It helps relieve the stress of grief to walk, ride a bike or engage in other physical activity.

## Comfort Yourself

Indulge yourself during this time. Nap, read a book, go to a movie or listen to your favorite music. Be frivolous. Distract yourself.

## Plan for Holidays and Anniversaries

Holidays, birthdays and anniversaries bring back painful emotions. The anniversary date of the death can be particularly stressful. Plan to be with family and friends who care during those times.

## Begin to Create a New Life for Yourself

Let yourself grieve as long as necessary. When you find yourself with renewed energy, get back into the flow of life. Go back to school, get a job, meet new people or develop new interests. Life is changed, but it can still be good.

# A Safe Place To Tell Your Story

## Shock and Denial

People respond to grief in different ways, but the most common first reactions are shock and denial. These emotions protect you from the hard blow of death, especially when the death is unexpected. Even when anticipated, there may be disbelief at the finality of death. During this phase of grief, you may feel numbness, like you are going through the motions but not feeling anything. You may also feel confused, have difficulty concentrating and experience a loss of appetite.

## Anger, Bargaining and Guilt

It is perfectly normal to experience anger. Accompanying it may be a strong sense of being cornered with no escape. You may feel anger at the deceased for leaving you or at physicians you felt didn't do enough. You may also be angry with God for allowing so much pain. The depth of your anger may be mild or raging. You may try a last ditch effort to bargain or plead with God. You may feel guilt and regret, too. You may wish you had done more or regret you left something unsaid.

## Sadness

When a death occurs there is no way to escape the sadness you feel. It covers you like a blanket. You may feel alone, afraid or abandoned. These are normal emotions. It is during this stage of grief that you may experience a lack of energy and feel like you will never stop crying.

## Acceptance

You will not "get over" a death. Accepting the death of someone you love does not mean forgetting, but rather integrating the death into your life. When you can do this, you are healing.

## Growth

Grief provides an opportunity for personal growth. After a death, you may find you have greater compassion for others. You may seek greater meaning in your life. You may discover new strengths and independence that you didn't know you had. You may have more emotional resources than you did before.