

Coping With Emotions During Grief

After the death of a loved one, you will experience many different emotions. At times, your emotions can feel overwhelming and may differ from what other grievers are experiencing. Grief is not just one specific set of emotions, it's a variety of feelings that wave over us at different times in our grief journey.

Even though emotions may be overwhelming and can be unexpected at times, they serve an important purpose during grief. Emotions provide information to you, giving you a better understanding of where you are in your healing, and more specifically, what you are needing at certain moments during your grief process.

Your coping style prior to your loved one's death can impact how you manage emotions after loss. It is important to acknowledge and express your feelings in ways that support healing, as opposed to making attempts to avoid or suppress emotions, as this can increase personal suffering in the long-term (i.e. ignoring, minimizing, or substance use).

We're a part of your story.



**You're not alone.
We're here to support.**

There is no timeline for grief. Knowing there are supports and resources available can give hope as you move through your grief.

Common Emotions in Grief

- 1. Shock:** Is an initial response and typically subsides over time.
 - Refrain from making large/major decisions (if possible).
 - Practice self-compassion.
 - Give yourself time.
- 2. Anger:** Is about protesting what has happened. Anger is protecting you from feeling depressed, helpless, or demoralized. It is important to release anger in a way that is safe for you and safe for others. Consider:
 - Physical exercise.
 - Tensing and releasing large muscle groups.
 - Deep controlled breathing.
 - Screaming outdoors or singing loudly when you are on your own (not directly at someone).
- 3. Guilt:** Allow yourself to remember that:
 - You cannot control every situation.
 - Most deaths cannot be prevented by one person.
 - Remind yourself of all you did for your loved one.
- 4. Loneliness/Withdrawal:** Set a plan to connect with trusted supports or attend a support group. Make time to leave your home daily, complete a simple task or sit outside, even for a short period of time.
- 5. Sadness:** Mourn. Acknowledge your loss, allow yourself to cry, connect with others, practice self-compassion, and self-care.
- 6. Fear, Anxiety, Panic:** You might be tempted to avoid or stop yourself from thinking about anxiety-provoking worries. You will feel relief when you write down or talk about your fears with others. When you review the facts of a situation and give yourself the opportunity to explore the likelihood of your worries coming to life (based on known facts rather than emotions) the discomfort you feel will slowly begin to decrease.

As you journey through grief, you will experience a variety of emotions. This occurs as your body naturally wants to move towards healing “You must feel it, to heal it” (A. Wolfelt).

It is important that you try to avoid urges to numb, repress or avoid your pain. Avoiding behaviours include: Keeping too busy, shopping excessively, using alcohol or drugs to numb the pain.



Emotional Well-being

- Talk to others (in person).
- Allow yourself to cry when you need to.
- Practice self-compassion and mindfulness. Mindfulness: To be completely focused on the specific activity you are doing: *When walking, focus on what the ground feels like under your feet, or the smell and temperature of the air, letting thoughts go and being present in the moment.*
- Use journaling as a way to express and release your current emotions.
- Write letters to your loved one who died.
- Use music or other memory-linking activities to encourage mourning.



Physical

- Exercise (walk, yoga, stretching).
- Maintain (work towards) a healthy sleep routine.
- Maintain (work towards) a healthy eating routine.
- Drink water; limit caffeine.
- Limit alcohol and/or drugs.



Social

- Accept invitations to spend time with others.
- Stay connected with friends and/or family.
- Surround yourself with supportive people.
- Be OK with saying “no” to maintain balance.
- Take time for yourself to reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and your grief journey.



Mind Health (Cognitive)

- Make lists.
- Accept offers of help/ask for help.
- Ask questions when you are unclear.
- Keep things simple; only do what is necessary.
- Be gentle to yourself; don't fault yourself for feeling confused, having trouble with concentration or memory.
- Try not to make any major changes or important decisions during the first year; if you must, discuss them with someone whom you trust.



Spiritual

- Pray.
- Meditate.
- Explore your belief system (religious and/or cultural beliefs).
- Re-evaluate your worldview.
- Make use of grief rituals: Plant a tree/flowers, light a candle, create a memory scrap book, visit your loved one's burial site, listen to music, or watch a movie that has significant meaning.
- Start a gratitude list.