

from the grief, laughs, plays, is productive at work, etc. Friends need to avoid these and other ways of predetermining what another's grief process should be like. An individual may have both personal and cultural differences in the ways that he or she deals with grief; friends need to support the bereaved in recovering and restoring balance in his or her own way

Final Note

Just as there is no single pattern to grief, there is no single way to help a grieving person. Both the grieving person and any friend who is trying to help may feel unsure and uncomfortable. Either way, remember that it is important to be yourself. Furthermore, remember that as a friend, just by listening and being with the grieving person, you probably are helping.

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Loss and Grief

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What is grief?

Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. Whether the loss involves the death of a loved one, the end of a special relationship, or becoming disabled – and whether the person is a senior citizen, a child or a college student – anyone can experience loss or grief.

At many points after a loss, the grieving person can benefit from the support of others. Individual grief reactions can vary widely, not only from person to person, but also within the same person over time. Accordingly, friends need to be ready to accept and support the griever through a wide range of emotions.

Reactions to Loss

People who are grieving will experience many reactions to their loss as they work toward resolution. At various times, but especially at first, the grieving person may experience intense and sometimes conflicting feelings or may deny that the loss has occurred. Strong feelings such as sadness, helplessness, loneliness, guilt, or anger can emerge. Experiencing and accepting these feelings as natural represents an important part of the recovery process. Ultimately, the grieving person reaches a point in the recovery process where the loss becomes integrated into his or her set of life experiences. He or she is not better able to carry out the tasks of daily living.

Throughout this recovery period, people who are grieving will experience many reactions. Some of the following reactions may indeed be experienced many times:

1. **Denial, shock, numbness** – reactions which distance the grieving person from the loss, thereby protecting him/her from being overwhelmed by emotions.
2. **Emotional releases** – these reactions accompany realisations for different aspects of the loss, they frequently involve much crying and they are often important to the healing process.
3. **Reactive depression** – natural feelings beyond sadness (e.g. feelings of loneliness, isolation, hopelessness, self-pity) which occur as the person more clearly recognises the extent of their loss. For many, reactive depression is part of the necessary internal processing of the loss which the grieving person must go through before reorganising his/her life.
4. **Panic** – feeling overwhelmed, confused, fearful, unable to cope, and even believing something is wrong with oneself.
5. **Remorse** – following a loss (whether through death, relationship break-up or disability) a grieving person sometimes becomes preoccupied with thoughts of what he/she might have done differently to have prevented the loss or to have made things better. This can be helpful as the person tries to make sense out of his or her situation, but can also lead to unrealistic feelings of remorse or guilt.
6. **Anger** – this is a frequent response to a perception of injustice and powerlessness. A significant loss can threaten the grieving person's basic beliefs about himself or herself or about life in general. As a result (often to the grieving person's bewilderment), he or she can feel anger

not only at a person perceived as responsible for the loss, or at God or life in general for the injustice of the loss but also – in cases of loss through death – at the deceased for dying.

7. **Need to talk** – in order to recognise and come to terms with the impact of the loss, the grieving person may express feelings, tell stories and share memories sometimes over and over with many different people.

8. **Physical ailments** – in response to the emotional stress of grief, many people are more vulnerable to a variety of physical ailments over the 6 to 18 months following loss (e.g. colds, nausea, hypertension etc.)

Obstacles to Healing

Grief is a misunderstood and neglected process in life. Because responding to losses and death is often awkward and uncomfortable for both griever and helpers, those concerned may avoid dealing with grief.

Society promotes many misconceptions about grief that may actually hinder the recovery and growth that follow loss. For example, friends and family may make statements such as, “you must be strong”, “you have to get on with your life”, or “it's good that they didn't have to suffer”. Such clichés may help the one saying them, but are rarely helpful to the griever. Other such misconceptions may be that it is not appropriate to show emotions except at the funeral or that recovery should be complete within a prescribed amount of time. Still other misconceptions would imply that the grieving person is being inappropriate when at times he or she breaks away