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Coping with Grief

Grief is a normal and natural emotional, physical, and social reaction to the loss of someone or something.

Grief may show up as loss of a:

- Loved one
- Special relationship
- Friendship, fellowship
- Normalcy
- Personal dream
- Academic goal
- Job
- Beloved pet

What are common grief events?

- Death of a loved one, family member, spouse, friend, partner, etc.
- Divorce, separation, breakup
- Personal injury or illness
- Change in Housing/living conditions
- Academic/school issues
- Financial troubles
- Career/employment/employer troubles
- Family separation
- Illness of a family member
- Sexual issues
- Pregnancy
- Disability
- Business disruptions
- Cancel culture
- Trouble with in-laws
- Personal failure
- Unplanned responsibility for others
- Imprisonment, legal issues
- Loss of affiliation with cultural group
- Change in social/personal agency
- Loss of safety
- Retirement

Anticipatory Grief

The current COVID-19 crisis may precipitate '[Anticipatory Grief](#)' symptoms similar to those experienced by those awaiting the forthcoming loss of another, or valued entity. Symptoms associated with anticipatory loss may not differ from common grief, but will likely feature the earlier stages of grief more prominently. Anger, frustration, paralysis, anxiety, and rumination are likely to accompany anticipatory grief, as the concerning event approaches or develops, however unpredictably. For all the categories listed above, anticipatory grief can occur before the loss or change occurs, rather than after.

Common Reactions to Grief and Loss

- Denial
- Avoidance
- Emotional Release
- Reactive Depression
- Panic
- Remorse
- Anger
- Physical Ailments
- Need for Empathy and Communication
- Being busy, productive, or unmotivated, apathetic
- Detachment, isolation

Effects of Grief

Feelings

- Sadness
- Helplessness, Hopelessness
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Bitterness, Anger, Rage
- Frustration
- Depression
- Yearnings
- Increased irritability
- Numbness
- Loss of enjoyment

Cognitive Changes

- Indecision
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Disjointed thoughts
- Confusion
- Decreased efficiency, decreased productivity

Physical Changes

- Headaches
- Speech difficulties (e.g., word finding)
- Fatigue
- Tenseness
- Dry throat
- Rapid pulse
- Interrupted sleep
- Weight loss

Behavioral Changes

- Increased use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco
- Changes in Relationships
- Excessive humor
- Difficulty relaxing
- Lowered sex drive
- Withdrawn/Isolated
- Loss/Gain of appetite

Coping with Grief

- **Talk to family and friends**
 - As we physically distance, we may talk to family and friends via zoom, skype, facetime, and/or over the phone. Use the medium that feels best for you and others in your life.
 - Grief can sometimes feel hard to talk about it, and can feel isolating. If you are hoping to connect with someone in your life around your grief, consider how you can prioritize this in your conversation. Text your friend or family member ahead of time if needed to let them know what you may need.
 - Give yourself breaks from the screen when needed.
- **Avoid comparing yourself or your grief to the experience of others. Practice self-compassion.**
 - Be patient with yourself. Grief is a complex and dynamic process
 - There is no right or wrong way to grieve.
 - Give yourself time and space. It's okay to slow down.
 - Allow for grief to come and go. Try not to judge yourself if your emotions change or seem unexpected.
- **Find community. There are others who may be going through similar emotions/experiences.**
 - It may help to share with others who have experienced loss.
 - Consider joining a support group and/or online support groups.
 - Consider connecting to other family or community members around your grief, as much as physical distancing allows.
 - Know that others may grieve differently, and that's okay too.

- **Listen to music**
 - Moving and dancing is allowed too.
- **Exercise**
 - It is a proven method for regulating emotions and improving mood.
- **Engage in social activities**
 - Be aware of possible depression symptoms
- **Spend time with pets**
 - Pets can assist with the healing process, and provide emotional support.
- **Practice basic self-care**
 - Create a routine around eating, diet, exercise, sleep, and hygiene.
- **Read poetry or a book**
 - Recommended books on grief:
 - Kushner, H.S. (1981). "When Bad things Happen to Good People." New York: Schocken Books.
 - Bloomfield, H.H. Colgrove, M., & McWilliams, P. (2000). "How to Survive the Loss of a Love." Mary Books/Prelude Press.
 - Myers, E. (1986). "When Parents Die: A Guide for Adults." Penguin Books.
 - Sandberg, S., & Grant, A. M. (2019). "Option B: facing adversity, building resilience, and finding joy." London: WH Allen.
 - Didion, Joan. (2005). "The Year of Magical Thinking." Alfred A. Knopf.
 - Hone, Lucy. (2017). "Resilient Grieving." The Experiment, LLC.
 - Kübler-Ross, E. & Kessler, D.(2005). "On Grief and Grieving. Finding the Meaning of Grief Through Five Stages of Loss." Scribner.
 - Chödrön, Pema. (1997). "When Things Fall Apart. Heart Advice for Difficult Times." Shambhala Publications.
- **If bereaved, decide how you would like to remember your lost one.**
 - Writing a letter to express your feelings and remember them
 - Listening to their favorite music or watching their favorite movie
 - Some cultures create altars to remember their loved ones
 - Having a family gathering to share stories about your loved one. This can be done via zoom, phone, or other technology.
 - Plant a tree, vine, or something alive that will grow in remembrance
 - Frame a favorite garment or use it to decorate a special place
 - Decide on an annual day to commemorate or celebrate their memory
 - Create a mosaic of pictures that keep their memory alive
- **Avoid excessive use of alcohol, drugs, or tobacco**
- **Seek counseling**
 - Many others have found therapy useful when suffering emotional distress, and life changes
 - Consider contacting Student Health and Counseling Services at 503-725-2800 for additional mental health support if symptoms persist.

Supporting others with Grief

- Take Action - Reach out, offer to help, take over practical matters if appropriate
- Be available - Offer your time and presence
- Check in on how the grieving person is feeling - Show you care
- Sitting and listening - Reconsider telling, informing, explaining, judging, advising, etc.
- Asking about their loss - Being an ally can include curiosity. Silence can increase loneliness and isolation.
- Validate their sadness and acknowledge their pain - Grief is natural, not pathological
- Things to say:
 - “I wish I knew what to say, but I’m here to listen if you need me.”
 - “How can I support you right now?”
 - “I wish I had the right words for you.”
 - “I don’t know what to say. I can’t imagine what you are going through.”
 - “Whatever you are feeling is okay, and you can share it with me if it will help.”
 - “Do you want to talk about what happened? I’m here to listen.”
 - A very simple, “I’m so sorry.”
- Do not minimize grief - Be careful of clichés, or attempts to avoid difficult feelings
- Assume variability in grief process - Everyone grieves at their own pace. Be patient
- Encourage self-care - Notice healthy priorities during the grieving process
- Remember their loss - Allow their grief to be a priority
- Prepare for grief to take many forms and behaviors - Some may seek moments of levity
- Accept your own limitations and process - Each of us will be able to empathize and help to varying degrees based on our own experience, personality, etc.
- Send care packages or deliver food.

Help Resources

- [What's Your Grief: Home](#)
- [Mindfulness & Grief: Compassionate Support and Guided Meditations](#)
- [Mindfulness & Grief: Compassionate Support and Guided Meditations](#)
- [Tips for College Students Grieving while in College](#)
- [The Compassionate Friends Non-Profit Organization for Grief](#)
- [Discussion Forums for Those Experiencing Grief](#)
- [Recover From Grief – Grief Loss Recovery Hope and Health Through Creative Grieving](#)
- [Start Navigating Grief](#)
- [Open To Hope, Support for Dealing with Death, Grief, Loss, Bereavement](#)
- [Grief Resources](#)
- [Resources for Those Wishing to Heal from Grief](#)