

# What is Grief?

Whenever we face loss, we experience grief. Everyone grieves differently, yet there are some common responses you might expect. Sr. Vice President, Grief Programs, Dr. Kenneth J. Doka, shares some basic facts on grief and loss that may be helpful in understanding the journey:

## An Introduction to Grieving

### *What is grief?*

Grief is a reaction to loss.

The way we experience grief is very individual; we each grieve in our own way. There are no universal “stages” to grief—grief is as individual as a fingerprint or a snowflake.

People may have different “styles” of grieving. Some people may express their grief verbally, or cry easily; other people may channel their grief into activity. All of these responses are normal; how we grieve is not a measure of how we love.

There is no timetable to grief. Over time the pain lessens, and we return to similar—sometimes better--levels of functioning.

### *Am I expected to grieve?*

#### **Grief is not predictable**

Each person's loss is unique; we cannot time and plot our reactions. Grief can be thought of as a roller coaster. It is full of ups and downs, highs and lows, times that we may think we are doing better and times that we are sure we are not. Our sense of progress may feel very uneven.

#### **Grief impacts each of us differently**

Because each loss is unique, we may experience a wide range of emotions. For some, the experience of grief may be physical: aches and pains, difficulty eating or sleeping, fatigue. Grief can affect our spiritual selves, too; our relationship with our faith beliefs may change or grow stronger.

#### **Grief is full of different tasks and processes**

As we cope with the emotional, physical, and spiritual reactions to the loss, we also work to accept the reality of the loss, redefine our beliefs in the face of this new reality,

readjust to the daily changes in our lives, and decide the ways we will remember the person who died.

### **Grief does not mean the end of connection**

Life will be different, and sometimes difficult; we need to be gentle with ourselves. But we always continue a bond with the person who has died. The lessening of grief is not the end of memory or attachment; death does not end a relationship.

## Survival tips for grief

Psychotherapist and author Judy Tatelbaum, MSW, shares tips for coping with a loss:

### **Keep busy**

You cannot dwell on your sorrow or your loss every waking moment. In the first flush of grief, you may feel you cannot control the extent of your suffering. But friends, activities, and other support can help to form a lifeline that gets you through the pain.

### **Keep a journal**

Some feelings may be too hard to speak aloud, like anger or regret; expressing them on paper can be freeing. Journal writing can serve as a release as well as a meaningful expression of yourself, and allows a private way to work through the many emotions experienced during the journey of grief.

### **Take care of yourself**

Move your body. Walking, dancing, swimming, or whatever activity pleases you, can help you feel better. Through exercise, you build your physical strength, release tension, enliven yourself, and keep yourself well. As much as you can, eat well-balanced meals and get an adequate amount of sleep.

### **Be willing to change things around**

It is natural to wish things were the way they were when our loved one was with us. Although loss is never easy to face, we need to remember we can go on with our lives. What it takes is paying attention to taking care of ourselves and our needs in the process.

[https://hospicefoundation.org/Grief-\(1\)/What-to-Expect](https://hospicefoundation.org/Grief-(1)/What-to-Expect)

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