



Grief

In our hearts, we all know that death is a part of life. In fact, death gives meaning to our existence because it reminds us how precious life is.

Coping With Loss

The loss of a loved one is life's most stressful event and can cause a major emotional crisis. After the death of someone you love, you experience bereavement, which literally means "to be deprived by death."

Knowing What to Expect

When a death takes place, you may experience a wide range of emotions, even when the death is expected. Many people report feeling an initial stage of numbness after first learning of a death, but there is no real order to the grieving process.

Some emotions you may experience include:

- Denial
- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Shock
- Sadness
- Yearning
- Anger
- Humiliation
- Despair
- Guilt

These feelings are normal and common reactions to loss. You may not be prepared for the intensity and duration of your emotions or how swiftly your moods

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may change. You may even begin to doubt the stability of your mental health. But be assured that these feelings are healthy and appropriate and will help you come to terms with your loss.

Remember - It takes time to fully absorb the impact of a major loss. You never stop missing your loved one, but the pain eases after time and allows you to go on with your life.

Mourning A Loved One

It is not easy to cope after a loved one dies. You will mourn and grieve. Mourning is the natural process you go through to accept a major loss. Mourning may include religious traditions honoring the dead or gathering with friends and family to share your loss. Mourning is personal and may last months or years.

Grieving is the outward expression of your loss. Your grief is likely to be expressed physically, emotionally, and psychologically. For instance, crying is a physical expression, while depression is a psychological expression.

It is very important to allow yourself to express these feelings. Often, death is a subject that is avoided, ignored or denied. At first it may seem helpful to separate yourself from the pain, but you cannot avoid grieving forever. Someday those feelings will need to be resolved or they may cause physical or emotional illness.

Many people report physical symptoms that accompany grief. Stomach pain, loss of appetite, intestinal upsets, sleep disturbances and loss of energy are all common symptoms of acute grief. Of all life's stresses, mourning



can seriously test your natural defense systems. Existing illnesses may worsen or new conditions may develop.

Profound emotional reactions may occur. These reactions include anxiety attacks, chronic fatigue, depression and thoughts of suicide. An obsession with the deceased is also a common reaction to death.

Dealing with a Major Loss

The death of a loved one is always difficult. Your reactions are influenced by the circumstances of a death, particularly when it is sudden or accidental. Your reactions are also influenced by your relationship with the person who died.

A child's death arouses an overwhelming sense of injustice - for lost potential, unfulfilled dreams and senseless suffering. Parents may feel responsible for the child's death, no matter how irrational that may seem. Parents may also feel that they have lost a vital part of their own identity.

A spouse's death is very traumatic. In addition to the severe emotional shock, the death may cause a potential financial crisis if the spouse was the family's main income source. The death may necessitate major social adjustments requiring the surviving spouse to parent alone, adjust to single life and maybe even return to work.

Elderly people may be especially vulnerable when they lose a spouse because it means losing a lifetime of shared experiences. At this time, feelings of loneliness may be compounded by the death of close friends.

A loss due to suicide can be among the most difficult losses to bear. They may leave the survivors with a tremendous burden of guilt, anger and shame.

Survivors may even feel responsible for the death. Seeking counseling during the first weeks after the suicide is particularly beneficial and advisable.

Living with Grief

Coping with death is vital to your mental health. It is only natural to experience grief when a loved one dies. The best thing you can do is allow yourself to grieve. There are many ways to cope effectively with your pain.

- Seek out caring people. Find relatives and friends who can understand your feelings of loss. Join support groups with others who are experiencing similar loss.
- Express your feelings. Tell others how you feel; it will help you to work through the grieving process.
- Take care of your health. Maintain regular contact with your family physician and be sure to eat well and get plenty of rest. Be aware of the danger of developing a dependence on medication or alcohol to deal with your grief.
- Accept that life is for the living. It takes effort to begin to live again in the present and not dwell on the past.
- Postpone major life changes. Try to hold off on making any major changes, such as moving, remarrying, changing jobs or having another child. You should give yourself time to adjust to your loss.
- Be patient. It can take months or even years to absorb a major loss and accept your changed life.
- Seek outside help when necessary. If your grief seems like it is too much to bear, seek professional assistance to help work through your grief. It's a sign of strength, not weakness, to seek help.