

Grief and Loss

Losing someone or something you care about is painful. And grief always follows. It's a normal process, with both physical and emotional signs. But even with major life changes, such as the loss of a spouse or parent, you can face the loss and move on.

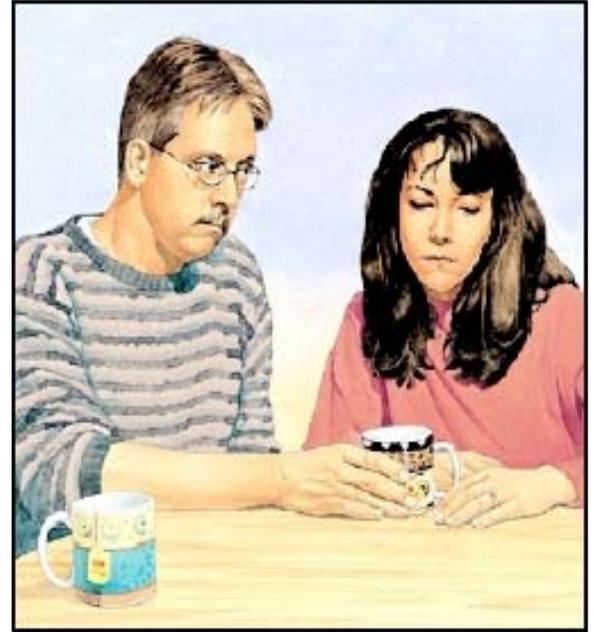
Losses We Grieve Over

Everyone feels a major loss at some point in life. These are just some of the types of loss you might be facing:

- The death of a family member or friend
- Health issues such as a permanent injury, chronic illness, or aging
- A breakup, separation, or divorce
- The loss of a job, a change in income, or other life changes.

How Loss Changes Us

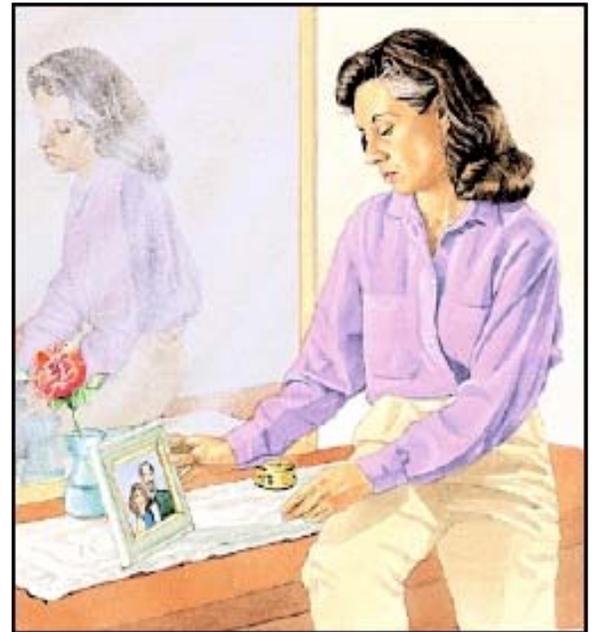
Loss leaves a "hole" in your life where what you lost used to be. The loss can affect the way you see yourself. Your daily routine changes if you have lost a partner, child, or parent. Your self-image may change if you are no longer healthy. After a divorce, you may need to think about life on your own.



Grief Takes Many Forms

Grief isn't just about sadness. It may make you experience a range of intense feelings. In fact, grief is often described as having five stages. They are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. So from moment to moment, you may:

- Not want to believe the loss is real.
- Feel annoyed or outright angry.
- Think you could have done something to stop the loss.
- Have sad moods and feel hopeless.
- Accept that the loss is real and that you can cope.



Helping Yourself Through Grief and Loss

Do what you can to stay healthy. Reaching out for support also helps. You may find yourself asking: “Why?” It’s normal to seek meaning by asking questions, but there’s not always an answer for loss. With time, your loss may still be part of your life, but not the only thing in it.

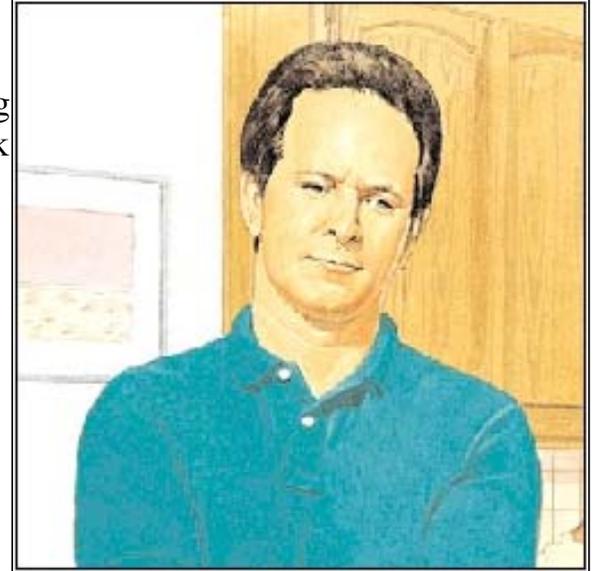
Take Care of Yourself

Taking good care of yourself helps your body heal from the physical signs of grief. Try to stick with healthy exercise, sleep, and eating routines. What else do you need to feel better? Having family around can help you feel loved. Or you might need a walk or movie with friends to take your mind off things for a little while.

Accept Support

Joining the world again is part of healing. These tips may help:

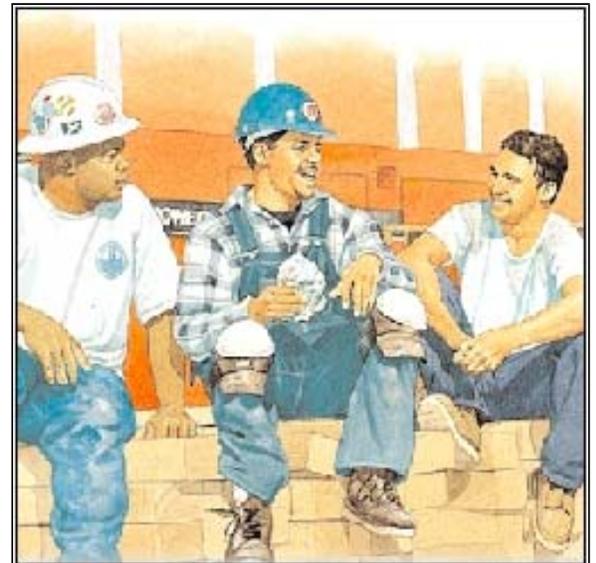
- Stay in touch with family and friends, even if it’s hard to talk.
- Tell people how they can help. It can be as simple as walking your dog.
- Attend a support group of people who have been through the same type of loss.



When to Get Help

There’s no normal length of time to grieve. But if you feel stuck and unable to move on, it may be time for professional help. Seeking professional help is not a sign of weakness. It indicates that you are taking responsibility for your recovery. Be alert to depression and call your doctor if you:

- Can’t go to work or take care of the kids.
- Can’t eat or sleep normally.
- Feel your grief is getting worse.
- Have repeated thoughts of suicide or of harming yourself. You can also call 9-1-1 or a crisis hotline (located in the yellow pages of your phonebook) if you have these thoughts.



At some point, you’ll begin thinking about the future. You’ll want to look ahead and make plans. To help yourself reach this point, try to do one thing each day to join in life. Keep at it, even if it feels strange at first. Your life can never be exactly the same. But one day you’ll find you’re living life fully again.

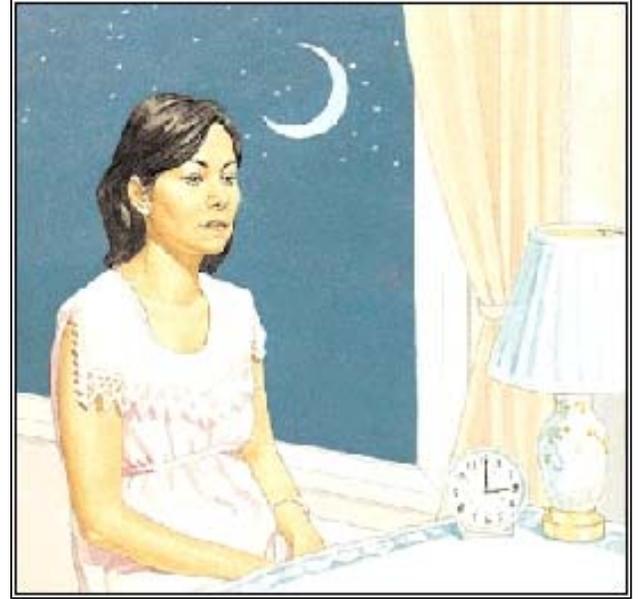
Moving Through Grief

Feeling better won't happen overnight. At first, it may be all you can do just to get through the day. But there is hope. Know that you will feel better with time, as long as you let yourself grieve. You need to grieve in order to heal. It hurts, but it is a normal part of healing process.

The First Response

Your first response is often the most intense. You may cry a lot. Or you may feel a deep numbness or shock. Everyone grieves in his or her own way, but there are common signs of grief:

- Having intense mood swings
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little
- Having trouble thinking clearly
- Wanting to be alone all the time



Give Yourself a Break

Try not to expect too much of yourself right away. It may be hard to work, take care of the kids, or focus on projects for a while. Give yourself more time than usual to get things done, since you may be distracted. Take time for yourself. Do some things that you enjoy. Go for a ride in the country. Read. It may feel like nothing brings you joy. But know that time really does help.

Know Your Grief Process

Let yourself feel all of your feelings and go through your grief fully. The process is full of ups and downs. One day you may feel a lot better. The next day, you may cry again. Try not to think: "I should be over this by now." There are no "shoulds" to grief. Let yourself mourn your loss as long as you need to. It might help to think of ways you dealt with a loss in the past. That way grief won't seem so scary and overwhelming.

Avoid Common Traps

Because grief hurts, it's tempting to avoid the pain. Grieve now. Try to avoid these things that delay healing and cause new problems:

- Using drugs, alcohol, or food to numb your feelings
- Making the loss seem smaller than it really is ("We weren't that close")
- Working long hours to avoid pain
- Trying to replace the loss
- Thinking over and over how you could "undo" the loss
- Staying alone to avoid sad feelings that come up around friends or family
- Thinking you have to stay strong all the time

is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.