



letting  
yourself  
grieve...

A Guide for Grief  
compliments of





# *The grieving experience...*

It is important to experience all of the thoughts and emotions that come up, as painful as they may be, and to treat yourself with patience and kindness.

## **Talk about your loss**

Take the time to talk to family, friends or a counselor. You can also find support by joining a hospice or community support group. Let them know you need to share your memories and express your sadness.

## **Forgive yourself**

For everything you believe you should have said or done. Also forgive yourself for emotions such as anger, guilt or embarrassment you may feel while grieving.

## **Eat well and exercise**

Grief is exhausting. It is important to maintain a balanced diet and rest. Exercise is also important to keep up your energy. Find a routine that you enjoy – clear your mind and refresh your body.

## **Indulge yourself**

Take naps, read a good book, listen to your favorite music, go to a ball game, rent a movie. Do something that is fun, distracting and that you find comforting.

## **Prepare for holidays and anniversaries**

Many people feel especially “blue” during these periods, and anniversary dates (of important family celebrations, a diagnosis, death) can be especially hard. Even when you feel you have moved forward in your grief.

Plan activities that give you an opportunity to mark these important times. These dates may bring back some painful feelings. Make plans to be with friends and family members with whom you feel comfortable. Plan activities that give you an opportunity to mark these important times.

## *Your reactions to grief may include...*

- Feeling empty and numb, as if you are in a state of shock
- Physical responses such as nausea, trouble breathing, crying, confusion, lack of energy, dry mouth, or changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- Anger— at a situation, a person or in general or guilt about what you did or did not do
- Withdrawal from family, friends and common activities. Difficulty focusing, working or making decisions
- Questions about faith or spirituality; challenges to the meaning, value and purpose you find in life

## *Grief is personal and has no timetable*

Thoughts, emotions, behaviors and other responses may come and go. Grief lasts as long as it takes to adjust to the changes in your life after your loss. For months, or even years.

it is different for everyone— there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief is the normal response of sorrow and emotions, thoughts and behaviors that follow the loss of someone or something important to you.

It is a natural part of life, and a typical reaction to death, divorce, illness, job loss, a move away from family and friends or any life changing experience.

## *Am I finished grieving?*

After a loss, you may be overwhelmed by the grief reactions you are experiencing. In time, you will learn to adjust to living with your loss.

Eventually, you will start to draw comfort rather than experience pain from the memories. In a sense, you are never “finished grieving.” With a loss, there will always be moments when you will remember the loss and you may experience moments when your grief is “triggered.”

There is no right way to grieve. It is an individual process. Life won't be the same after a loss, but experiencing your grief will allow you to adjust to life after loss.

## *What can I do to honor my loved one?*

Preserve memories. You could do something to honor the person you love in a way that fits. Plant a tree or garden. Take part in a charity run or walk.

Make a memory box or folder that has reminders of the person who has died. Include mementos, photos, quotes, or whatever you choose.

If you want, write a letter to the person. In it, you might include your feelings and things you want to say. Some people write a gratitude letter. It's a way to thank your loved one for being a part of your life. If they encouraged good qualities in you, keep living those good qualities as a way to honor them.

*Love, gratitude, and meaning can  
help you through a difficult time.*

# Common Grief Reactions

Grief affects everyone differently, but everyone will have some reaction to grief. Grief affects many aspects of a person's life. Grief is not just emotional. It affects how a person feels, thinks, behaves—even what they believe. The intensity changes over time and through personal growth. Below are some common grief reactions of adults.

## PHYSICAL REACTIONS

- Feeling weak or faint
- Muscle tension, aches or pains
- Change in appetite (increase or decrease)
- Increased blood pressure
- Sleep disturbances (more, less or walking more)
- Fatigue or exhaustion
- Rapid heartbeat
- Weight change
- Decreased resistance to illness
- Indigestion
- Headaches
- Hypersensitivity to sights, sounds, smells, touch
- Dry mouth
- Tightness or heaviness in the chest
- Hollow feeling in stomach
- Lump in throat
- Sobbing
- Deep sighing

## SPIRITUAL REACTIONS

- Asking “why” questions
- Anger at God
- Change in beliefs and values
- Loss or strengthening of faith
- Need to find meaning in the loss

## COGNITIVE REACTIONS

- Short-term memory loss
- Difficulty concentrating
- Confusion
- Preoccupation with loss/death
- Difficulty making decisions, even simple ones
- Searching to understand
- Disbelief
- Increase/decrease in dreams
- Suicidal thoughts

## EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

- Anger
- Sadness
- Depression
- Anxious
- Despair
- Loneliness
- Feeling “out of control”
- Mood Swings
- Guilt, including survivor guilt
- Relief
- Numbness
- Hopelessness
- Fear
- Longing/yearning for loved one
- Bitter
- Calm

## BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

- Forgetfulness
- Blaming others
- Avoidance of people/situations
- Change in activity (increase or decrease)
- Neglecting oneself (hygiene, eating, health)
- Loss of interest in work, world events, social activities, sex
- Increase in use of alcohol/drugs/medications
- Acting out

# The Mourner's Bill of Rights

*Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., C.T.*

Though you should reach out to others as you do the work of mourning, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain "rights" no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. You have the right to experience your own unique grief. No one else will grieve in the exact same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.
2. You have the right to talk about your grief. Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want about your grief. If at times you do not feel like talking, you also have the right to be silent.
3. You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions. Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without conditions.
4. You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.



5. You have the right to experience “grief-bursts”. Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but it is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.
6. You have the right to make use of ritual. The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you the funeral or other healing rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don’t listen.
7. You have the right to embrace your spirituality. If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won’t be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.
8. You have the right to search for meaning. You may find yourself asking, “Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?” Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, “It was God’s will” or “Think of what you have to be thankful for” are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.
9. You have the right to treasure your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.
10. You have the right to move toward your grief and heal. Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

# Bereavement Support

We are here for you during this difficult time, please be sure to take advantage of the services we can provide to you, your family and our community as a whole.

Our Bereavement team strives to assure our bereaved compassion, mutual support, understanding, diversity, integrity and also allow our families to feel safe and supported in a nurturing environment.

Family members of our hospice patients are offered 13 months of Bereavement Support after the loss of their loved one as a part of our hospice program. We offer in person, phone, individual & group settings to help you through this difficult time. Additionally, caregivers are sent a monthly "Journey's" bereavement newsletter free of charge that can help you through your journey of grief.

For community members struggling with grief of any type we know the value of having helpful resources in times of struggle. We offer our many grief & behavioral health resources to help our community whether they have been a part of our hospice program or not:

- Join our facebook grief support group [@Journey of Grief](#)
- Follow us on facebook [@PCHospice](#)
- Visit our website for a wealth of resources and blogs: [PikeCountyHospice.com](http://PikeCountyHospice.com)
- Call our agency or visit our agency website to find out about our Mental & Behavioral Health counseling and Tele-Psych Services: [PikeCountyHealth.org](http://PikeCountyHealth.org)

*"How do we go on  
after the unthinkable happens?"*

*How can we carry the burden of knowing  
the world can be cruel and dangerous,  
the future so unpredictable?*

*How do we grieve with empty arms  
and a head filled with echoing memories?*

*We are stronger than we know,  
and this is how we show it:  
Holding each other,  
giving comfort in the midst of pain.  
Loving more fiercely,  
through our actions and the things we say.*

*Making the world just a little bit better,  
every single day.  
Never taking life for granted,  
knowing that it can be snatched away.*

*This world may bring deep darkness,  
but we are the bearers of light.  
We'll join our flames together,  
and shine in the blackest of nights."*

- JOHN MARK GREEN -

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