

Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning

Bereavement is the state of having lost a significant other to death. **Grief** is the personal response to the loss. **Mourning** is the public expression of that loss.

What is “normal” grief?

Grief reactions vary depending on who we are, who we lost, our relationship with that person, the circumstances around their passing, and how much his or her loss affects our day-to-day functioning. Different people may express grief differently, and you may even have different grief responses between one loss and another. Reactions to grief and loss include not just emotional symptoms but also behavioral and physical symptoms. These reactions often change over time. All are normal for a short period of time.

Emotional: shock, denial, numbness, sadness, anxiety, guilt, fear, anger, irritability

Behavioral: crying unexpectedly, sleep changes, not eating, withdrawing from others, restlessness, trouble making decisions

Physical: concentration problems, exhaustion/fatigue, decreased energy, memory problems, upset stomach, pain, and headaches

Symptoms that are not normal and may signal the need to talk to a professional include use of drugs or alcohol, violence, and thoughts of killing oneself.

The **duration** of grief varies from person to person. Research shows that the average recovery time is 18 to 24 months. Grief reactions can be stronger around significant dates, like the anniversary of the person’s death, birthdays, and holidays.

Give yourself time to grieve. It is normal and important to express your grief and to work through the concerns that arise for you at this time. “Stuffing” your feelings may not be helpful and may delay or prolong your grief.

1. **Find supportive people to reach out to during your grief.** This is the time when the support of others may be the most helpful. Don't be afraid to tell them how they can best help, even if it means just listening. It is often helpful to talk about your loss with people who will allow you to express your emotions.
2. **Take care of your health.** After a loss, we often stop doing the things we need to for health care, such as exercising, eating correctly, or taking prescribed medications. If you are on a health care regimen, it is important to continue to that plan.
3. **Postpone major life changes.** Give yourself time to adjust to your loss before making plans to change jobs, move or sell your home, or remarry, for example. Grief can sometimes cloud your judgment and ability to make decisions.
4. **Consider keeping a journal.** It is often helpful to write or tell the story of your loss and what it means to you as a way to work through your feelings.
5. **Participate in activities.** Staying active through exercise, enjoyable activities, outings with supportive others, or starting new hobbies can help us get through tough times while providing opportunities for constructive development and use of energy.
6. **Find a way to memorialize your loved one.** Planting a tree or garden in the name of your loved one, dedicating a work to their memory, contributing to a charity in their name, and other such activities can be helpful.

Consider joining grief-support groups or contacting a grief counselor for additional support

and help. Depressive symptoms (feeling sad) are a normal part of bereavement. Staying active and finding support from others can help you through the grief process.
