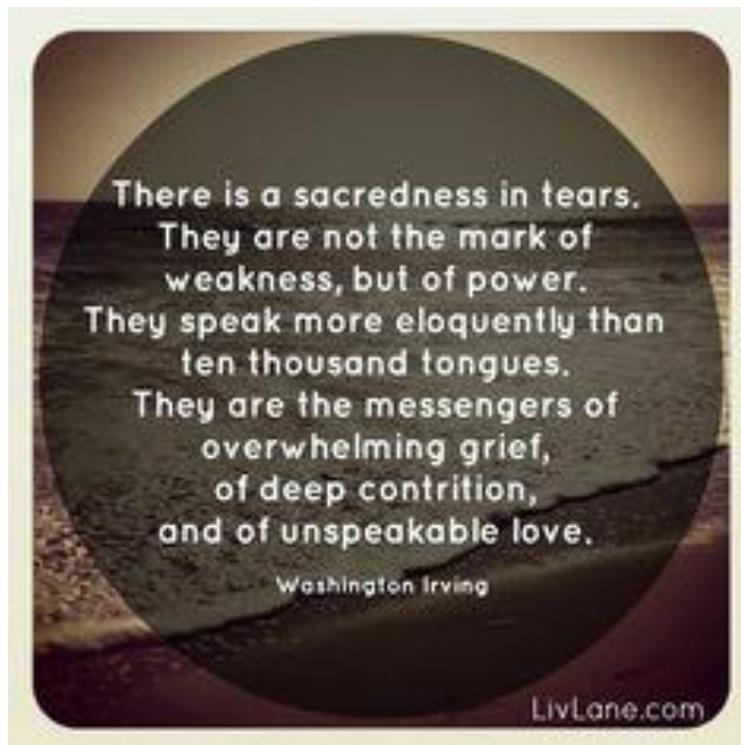


## Understanding Loss, Grief and Bereavement



***“To live is to choose. But to choose well, you must know who you are and what you stand for, where you want to go and why you want to get there.”***  
***- Kofi Annan***

## The Labyrinth of Grief

*It is a labyrinth.*

*Those who grieve, walk its path  
as it winds back and forth,  
in and out, day after day,  
winding back upon itself and out around its edge  
then back to where the path began.*

*How long does it take to get to the heart of it?  
How many times do we turn and feel as  
if we are back where we began  
or that we walked through these feelings once before?*

*And what is it that is in the center?  
Just where am I on this long circuitous path?  
So difficult to know.*

*This labyrinth so often feels like a maze  
with dead ends that trap me,  
seemingly leaving only one recourse-  
to go back, to retrace my steps.  
But there is no turning back.*

*I must draw on my wisdom,  
that inner voice reminding me that  
what seems familiar is just an illusion.  
I must honor the wisdom that says...  
you can keep going, that is not a wall, this is not a dead end.*

*How much pain can one soul handle?  
What am I to learn from this teacher (grief) that invaded my life?  
Where am I going? Who am I?  
How broken I am! How lost. How empty. How sad.  
As I walk this labyrinth of grief.*

# Grief and Bereavement

## What is Grief?

Grief is our reaction to loss. It affects us physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and behaviourally. Grief has no specific time frame. It can come in waves or like a rollercoaster. Everyone grieves differently. When you've met one person who is grieving you've met one person who is grieving.

Grief is an individual process. It's making meaning or finding purpose for one's life and accommodating and adjusting to losses. It asks a person to define themselves within their grief and create a new story or new relationship with the person you are losing/have lost.

Grief begins with the diagnosis. You will most likely experience the various stages of grief even while your loved one is alive. This is called anticipatory grief as you experience ongoing losses and look in the future to see your perceived losses (what you hoped your loved one would be around for that they will not be).

Normal reactions to grief and anticipatory grief:

- Shock, numbness and disbelief
- Panic or relief
- Strong physical or emotional reactions
- People needing to stay physically attached or separate
- People needing to attend to practical needs or be as little or as much involved as possible

## What is Bereavement?

Bereavement is the experience of grief.

## Types of Loss

There are many types of loss (death, divorce/separation, loss of job, a move, etc). These initial losses are referred to as primary losses. There are also an array of secondary losses which accompany the primary loss, such as loss of relationship, companionship, security, identity, finances, stability, role, support system, hopes, dreams and expectations, to name a few. We refer to these as secondary not because they are any less significant but because they are effects of the initial loss. All of these losses are real. All bring about grief.

## Tasks of Grieving

The four tasks of grieving are to accept the reality of the loss, experience the pain of the loss, adjust to the new environment without what or whom we've lost and reinvest in the new reality.

## **COMMON RESPONSES WITH GRIEVING**

### **Feelings**

Helplessness  
Sadness  
Anger  
Guilt  
Anxiety  
Loneliness  
Irritability  
Fear  
Fatigue  
Relief  
Shock  
Yearning  
Numbness  
Apathy  
Indifference  
Resentment

### **Thoughts**

Disbelief  
Confusion  
Preoccupation about the deceased  
Halluncinations  
Doubt own sanity  
Sense of unreality  
Inability to concentrate  
Lowered self-esteem  
Slowed thinking  
Absent minded, forgetful  
Reliving the death, funeral, etc  
Awareness of own mortality  
Idealize deceased  
Worry  
Unrealistic

### **Physical Symptoms**

Tightness in chest, palpitations  
Weakness of muscles  
Dry mouth  
Lack of energy  
Constipation or diarrhea  
Breathlessness  
Nausea  
Headaches  
Sexual disturbances  
Irregular heart beat  
Weight loss or gain  
Dizziness, shivering

### **Behaviours**

Inability to sleep  
Waking early  
Over or under eating  
Withdrawal from others  
Dreaming about the deceased  
Nightmares  
Over active  
Avoiding reminders of the deceased  
Treasuring objects of the deceased  
Sighing  
Inability to make decisions  
Crying (sometimes for long periods of time)  
Restlessness  
Lack of interest in activities

### **Spiritual Issues**

Blaming God or life  
Lack of meaning or direction to life  
Wanting to die/join the dead person

When someone experiences loss, such as the death of a loved one, the grieving process occurs. Grief is experienced in a variety of ways. These are normal responses to the loss. One person may not experience all of the symptoms listed above and the intensity and duration varies from person to person. If symptoms last for a very long time, or are unusually intense, professional help should be sought.

## GRIEVING STYLES

It is important to remember that everyone grieves differently. Within one family there may be many styles of grieving. It is often difficult to understand why someone in your family is behaving in the opposite way in which you think they should respond to what's happening.

### *Instrumental*

Repairs  
Gives tasks  
Makes arrangements  
Works on projects

### *Intuitive*

Emotive  
Expressive  
Process/Feel  
Attends support groups

Both grieving styles feel pain but express it differently. It is common that a person will react in the opposite manner to how they normally respond to stress. For example, if someone is generally a very instrumental person, you may find that he/she becomes more intuitive while grieving. This is not always the case, but it can often occur. Try to meet the members of your family at where they are in their own grief. Although you are all grieving the same loss, you each had different relationships with your loved one.

<b>INTUITIVE GRIEVING</b>	<b>INSTRUMENTAL GRIEVING</b>
Grief is experienced and expressed through feelings	Grief is experienced and expressed through thoughts and actions
Griever responds to inner cues (emotions) so it feels out of control	Griever strives to maintain sense of control (master feelings)
Is an "all encompassing" process, struggle to attend to responsibilities, issues	Loss is a challenge with issues to resolve

<p><b>Adaptive Strategies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• go with the experience, act in response to feelings</li> <li>• Share/discuss feelings to work through grief</li> <li>• Adjust slowly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think and plan, find activities to channel energy and express grief</li> <li>• Share activities not feelings</li> <li>• Adjust/restore normal routines quickly</li> </ul>
<p><b>Support Options:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen, encourage exploration and expression of feelings</li> <li>• connections with other bereaved people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore impact, encourage memorialisation/activities</li> <li>• Give grief information</li> </ul>

## WHAT CAN HELP WITH GRIEF

- Cry, scream, yell – express your feelings as they come up
- Talk to someone who will just listen. Tell stories. Share memories.
- Get regular sleep – go to bed at the same time each night even if you're not tired then get up at the same time each day (get up again if after 30-40 minutes you still can't sleep – do an activity and then try again)
- Do some physical activity each day
- Take naps if you need them
- Eat frequent, healthy, small meals and snacks – keep feeding your body
- Drink water, juice, tea – keep yourself hydrated
- Try a relaxation exercise
- Listen to uplifting music
- Go for a walk or run
- Sit with nature – by the river or in a quiet park – breathe in some fresh air
- Follow spiritual practices (sweat, church, prayer song, etc)
- Write a journal
- Write a letter to the person who died, then bury it, burn it or put it away
- Write a story, poem, song for the person
- Let yourself have fun- Let yourself laugh
- Don't judge yourself or your grieving process
- Ask for help from friends and supporters
- If you get stuck in a state, or the feelings seem out of proportion, seek counselling.

It may help to think of grief as a journey rather than a hurdle to be crossed. Along this journey we learn how to live without someone who was once a part of our lives. Learning to do anything takes time and practice. Grief is no different. The following ideas may help as you find your way through grief to healing:

### **Recognize the loss**

Many people try to stay busy after the death of someone close to them. Staying busy can be distracting, but too much activity, too soon, may not be helpful. It is important that you do as much as is comfortable for you while allowing yourself time to reflect, rest and feel. It may help to look through old pictures, remember special times, cry when you feel like it and laugh when you feel like it.

### **Recognize how you feel**

There are so many feelings to sort out after someone dies. Simply noticing and recognizing your feelings can help you feel less anxious and overwhelmed. You may find that your feelings come and go more easily when you don't spend energy resisting them.

### **Take time to remember**

The last days of your loved one's life may be fresh in your memory. Make an effort to remember other times as well – good and bad. It is common for people to avoid mentioning the person who has died because they do not want to upset you. When talking with people who knew your loved one, ask them about their memories and offer yours. This gives them permission to talk about the person who has died and share encouragement and support.

Creating a memory book with photos and mementos of special events, holiday celebrations, or travels may help bring back memories of better days. You may also want to remember your loved one with special activities such as lighting candles of remembrance, attending religious services or planting a tree. Keeping the memory of someone special alive can be a comfort as you grieve.

### **Honour special events**

Holidays, anniversaries, special dates and places may trigger feelings of deep sadness. It is normal to remember and mourn your loss. Be gentle with yourself. The hurt and pain will lessen over time. Until it does, you might want to try creating new ways to celebrate or to honour your loved one's memory. Talking with family members and friends who are also missing your loved one might help you come up with ideas that make everyone feel comforted.

### **Hold off on big decisions**

Making decisions may be difficult or confusing when you are dealing with so many feelings. You may find it helpful to avoid making life-changing decisions while your grief is fresh.

### **Take care of your body**

Grieving is hard work that takes a lot of energy. It is easy for your physical health to suffer when you are experiencing loss and grief. Remember the basics – eating healthy food, resting and getting some exercise will give your body the tools it needs to adjust to this strain.

### **Nurture your spirit**

Grief can bring up painful questions and doubts about many of our most fundamental beliefs. You may feel lost and vulnerable. Prayer, meditation or other spiritual activities may bring comfort and reassurance. Consider sharing your concerns with an experienced chaplain, member of the clergy or spiritual advisor.

**Talk to others**

Grieving can feel very lonely. It is reassuring to know that you are not the only one who has felt this way. Talking to someone who has lived through the death of someone they cared about may be helpful. Consider opening up to a friend, family member, volunteer, counsellor, or clergy or attending a support group for people who are grieving.

**Believe in a less painful tomorrow**

Along this journey, there will be good days and not-so-good days. As you heal, the pain of your loss may not hurt as much as it did immediately, but the fact that someone you love is no longer with you will remain. You can adjust to this new life. It will take time.

**How are you?**

There is no set time limit for grieving, but generally the feelings become less intense as time passes. If you are concerned about how grief is affecting your life, try asking yourself the following questions:

- Am I feeling “stuck” or having trouble expressing my feelings?
- Is my health getting worse over time?
- Have my eating habits changed?
- Am I using alcohol or drugs to cope with my feelings?
- Am I usually irritable or angry or detached?
- Are my thoughts or feelings interfering with my work or other important areas of my life?
- Am I having thoughts of ending my own life?
- Do I feel responsible for my loved one’s death?
- Do upsetting images keep coming to mind?
- Am I having disturbing dreams?
- Do I feel sad and alone most of the time?

## THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT GRIEF...

You cannot go around, over or under grief – you must go through it.

Grief is the other end of love. When you love deeply, it's only natural to grieve deeply.

Grief lasts months to years and there is very little understanding of that in our society.

Grieving is a process that takes place over time. The word “process” does not imply that grief has any fixed schedule or program. Grief reactions can overlap and take varying lengths of time, depending on the individuals

The most common experience of grievers is their inability to understand that there is nothing wrong with them. This is what grief “looks like.”

Don't assume you know what a grieving person needs. Some people want to talk about the person who died. Others don't. The best strategy is to let the grieving person tell you what would be helpful.

**Grief is our reaction to loss.** Mourning is the experience of loss and it allows us to express our grief. Grief and mourning are important. They are our body's way of surviving, adjusting and eventually transcending.

### The Four Tasks of Grieving

The way to transcend grief

1. Accept the reality of the loss
2. Experience the pain of the loss
3. Adjust to the new environment without the lost person
4. Reinvest in the new reality

Many of us get stuck on experiencing the pain because some feelings are new to us, uncomfortable to stay with, difficult to identify, difficult to acknowledge and/or difficult to express safely, and oftentimes we are not heard. It becomes too overwhelming to deal with so we try to stuff these emotions down hoping they will go away through time. But, just like physical pain, bandaging a deep emotional wound will not heal it. We must get to the root of the problem, treat it and allow ourselves sufficient time to heal. Pushing down the pain will only leave room for it to resurface and often with a more detrimental outcome than if we had treated it early. So, until we can go into the depths of ourselves to experience this pain we can never fully reinvest and move forward. (Labyrinth)

As human beings we tend to attach ourselves to things, then we have to let them go (Ex. graduation, getting married, having kids, moving, etc) These moments all require us to redefine ourselves and we all grieve the losses just like we do a death. When we're ready we start to refocus from what's been lost to focus on new life and future. We can still incorporate parts of what we've lost into what our life is now about.

### When Integration Occurs...

- ☐ There is a sense of psychological closeness
- ☐ Little self or other blaming
- ☐ Confidence in own ability to cope, optimism

- ▣ High level of meaning making
- ▣ Connected to strong cultural, social support
- ▣ Confidence in own ability to cope well
- ▣ Spiritual/religious connection

### **Ways to Recognize “Unsuccessful Integration”**

- ▣ Anguished search for meaning in the death
- ▣ A ‘frozen’ story about the death and losses; stuck
- ▣ Loss of support
- ▣ Ruminating, as a coping strategy (going over and over it)
- ▣ Needing physical proximity, concrete reminders

### **What Can Make Grief More Difficult**

There are some situations that can make it more difficult to work through grief. If you have experienced any of the following, please consider letting a professional assist you in recovering from your loss.

- Traumatic death - homicide, suicide, sudden or unexpected death
- Death of a child
- Multiple losses – other deaths within the year, a divorce, a move, children leaving home, other caregiving responsibilities, financial issues
- Limited support system – few friends, family
- Spiritual isolation – feeling that life has no meaning
- History of mental illness or substance abuse
- Prolonged caregiving role – especially with person who had dementia or other
- long-term chronic disease
- Past history of multiple losses
- Troubled relationship or issues left unresolved, with the deceased

### **Complicated Grief**

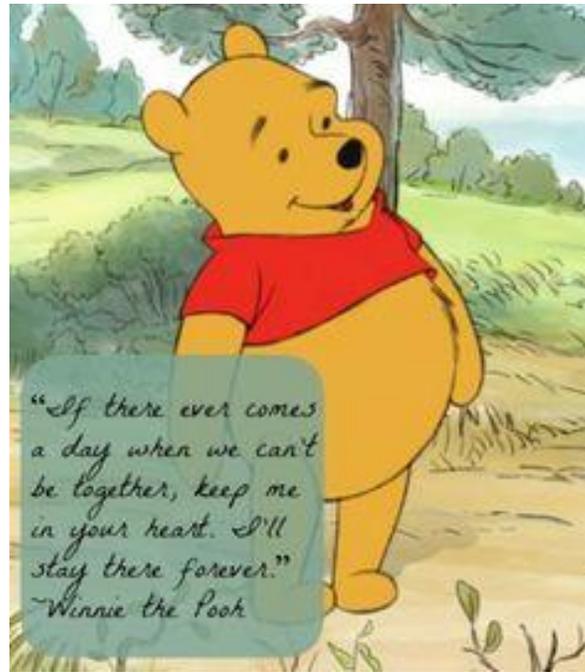
Some factors which may determine who moves through grief in a healthy way:

- Level of support
- Allowing oneself to feel his/her emotions
- Finding peace even in horrific circumstances
- Ability to find meaning in the death
- Personality type

Some factors which may determine who gets “stuck” in their grief:

- Cumulative loss and trauma
- Unable to find joy and meaning
- Pain doesn’t lessen even over time
- The same scenario or issue is continually replayed
- Set on blame, anger, obsession with the cause of the loss

When you are stuck, your grief doesn’t change over the years. Sometimes it takes more than a support session to help you move past complicated grief. Often, cognitive therapy, in conjunction with another helping method such as medication or psychotherapy, may be able to help.



*"If there ever comes  
a day when we can't  
be together, keep me  
in your heart. I'll  
stay there forever."  
-Winnie the Pooh*

**I do not believe that  
sheer suffering teaches.  
If suffering alone taught,  
all the world would be wise  
since everyone suffers.**

**To suffering must be added  
*mourning*  
*understanding*  
*patience*  
*love*  
*openness***

**and the willingness to remain vulnerable.**

*-Ann Morrow Lindbergh*