



Healing

Recognizing and coping with sadness after a loss

Aetna Resources For LivingSM

It's hard to lose someone or something we care about. Grief doesn't follow any rules. We all hurt and heal in our own ways.

And while grieving is unique to each of us, some experiences are common. Understanding grief and learning how to cope may help you with this tough time.

Losses we grieve

People grieve for many different things, including loss of a:

- Loved one, pet or beloved public figure
- Life role, such as a career or parenthood, when children move into adulthood
- Physical ability, such as hearing or seeing
- The break-up of a relationship or marriage

- Home, neighborhood, friends or phase of life when moving
- Plans for the future when life changes unexpectedly
- Possessions
- Beliefs — in a person, idea or cause

Stages of grief

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss psychiatrist, identified five stages of grief that people generally experience.

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance



Expressions of grief

Grief is personal. Everyone responds differently to loss. Some people show grief so it can be seen and felt by those around them. Others do not. If you're grieving a loss, you might have some of these reactions:

Physical: Stomachache or headache, pain around the heart area, insomnia, fatigue, dizziness, trembling, teeth grinding, panic attacks. Though they may appear in a time of grief, it's still important to see a doctor to check out any physical symptoms you may have.

Emotional: Shock, disbelief, numbness, anxiety, confusion, frustration, depression, guilt, loneliness, anger, detachment.

Behavioral: Crying, pacing, staring, forgetting things, losing interest, losing focus, daydreaming, obsessing over the loss, worrying about one's own health.

Spiritual: Anger at the world or a higher power, losing faith, finding faith, becoming more thoughtful or philosophical.

Young children and teenagers may also respond by showing:

- Fear that they caused the situation
- Concern about their future
- Hostility
- Regression — behaving as they did at a younger age

Providing support

You can support yourself or someone who is moving through the grief process.

- **Let emotions come and go.** Acknowledge your feelings, and remember they can change suddenly while you grieve.
- **Write down feelings and thoughts daily**
- **Let people you trust, know what happened**
- **Return to familiar routines when you're ready**
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Even if you're not hungry, eating small, healthy meals throughout the day can boost your energy and help even out your mood
- **Get some exercise.** It can help you feel better and improve your sleep

- **Honor the anniversary or birthday** of a departed loved one by:

- Visiting the grave
- Volunteering for a cause meaningful to you and that person
- Planting a flower or tree
- Visiting a favorite place of the loved one

Seeking professional help

Grief can interfere with your ability to care for yourself or your responsibilities. This is the time to reach out to a professional for help.

Please consider calling us or other mental health services if you are:

- Focusing on what you didn't do or could have done
 - "I should have said I loved him"
 - "I should have saved more money"
- Having persistent unresolved feelings
- Experiencing more or stronger reactions over an extended period of time
- Feeling hopeless, helpless or suicidal
- Increasing your use of alcohol or drugs

Loss isn't something you 'get over.' It changes you. But you'll come out on the other side.

Confidential support is available
24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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