

Grieving Adults: What to Expect and What Helps

When a child dies, many adults in the child's life feel overwhelmed and confused by grief. Grief is a process to be lived, not a problem to be fixed. Everyone grieves in different ways. You may have changes in emotions, thoughts and behaviors. You may also experience physical, social, and spiritual changes. Give yourself time and grace as you find your way through this painful time. The raw pain will soften, and your grief will change throughout your life. Here are some common ways you might experience grief:



Emotions

- Sad
- Angry
- Guilty
- Shocked
- Exhausted
- Lonely
- Confused
- Numb
- Empty
- Regretful
- Powerless
- Yearning
- Hopeless
- Overwhelmed
- Afraid
- Relieved
- Grateful
- Proud
- Love
- Humbled
- Anxious
- Worried

Thought and Behavior Changes

- Disbelief: "This can't be real"
- Injustice: "This isn't fair"
- Apathy: Not caring about self or others
- Unable to focus or sit still
- Questioning decisions
- Replaying moments and conversations
- Telling and retelling what happened
- Memories of your pregnancy or child
- Forgetfulness or "brain fog"
- Unmotivated, loss of interest in activities
- Avoiding reminders of your child or their death
- Constant worry about danger or illness for yourself, future pregnancies or others

Physical Changes

- Crying when expected or unexpectedly
- Unable to cry, but feeling like you need to
- Physical pain (back, chest, stomach)
- Physical and emotional pain if you are lactating
- Feeling stressed and unable to cope
- Loss of energy and feeling tired
- Unable to fall asleep or stay asleep or sleeping too much
- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Taking care of your body, including seeing a doctor for a check-up

Spiritual Care/ Social Work

Social changes

- Wanting or not wanting to be alone
- Feeling unsure of how to be yourself with others
- Avoiding social situations (holidays and celebrations)
- People treating you differently or avoiding you
- People saying insensitive or hurtful things
- New friendships with other grieving adults
- Trying to avoid change (wanting everything to stay the same)
- Wanting to make changes, give away belongings, move pictures or rearrange furniture
- Changing priorities and values
- Changes in relationships with the friends and classmates of your child and their families

Spiritual Changes

- Searching for purpose in life
- Turning more deeply to your faith
- Losing or questioning your faith
- Feeling abandoned by or angry with God/Creator/the universe
- Experiencing signs and synchronicities
- Looking for a sense of connection with your child
- Having dreams about your child
- Finding comfort in a belief that they are with loved ones who have died before
- Finding distress in a lack of proof of an afterlife
- Questioning why this happened
- Increased desire to quiet the mind and meditate or pray, even if you never have before

What Helps?

Though this is a difficult time, there are many things that can help ease some of your pain. From talking to a trusted friend, to exercising, meditation or prayer, there are many ways you can cope. Doctors and mental health professionals can assist with referrals to resources. For one-on-one support, you may find it helpful to see a therapist, spiritual leader, or counselor.

You could also try a grief support group or online forum where you can connect with others going through similar experiences. Many other things can help with your grief:



- Talking about your child, sharing memories
- Spending time in nature
- Reading books about grief
- Basic needs: food, water and rest
- Distraction: watching familiar TV and movies, reading for pleasure
- Artistic expression: drawing, painting, writing, listening to or making music

For help understanding grief or to find support, email or call:

Email: bereavement@chla.usc.edu | **Phone:** (323) 376-5083

Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and some evenings