National Grief Awareness Day: Coping with Grief

Whether you have recently experienced loss, life-changing adjustments, or an unexpected health diagnosis, grief can hit anyone, at any time. Grief can take on many different shapes, in many different forms, and because of this, there are no wrong ways to experience grief.

While grief is difficult for everyone to experience, developing a deeper understanding of the emotion will prove to be beneficial for those working their way through the grieving process, helping them find healthy and effective coping mechanisms to get through the difficult times.

# What is Grief?

Grief is a feeling of extreme sorrow. The emotional pain known as grief is most commonly experienced when a person experiences a significant loss of something or somebody you love. Loss can often be associated with many overwhelming and, at times, confusing emotions, such as guilt, immense sadness, anger, and denial.

These emotions are completely normal when experiencing loss. Most people believe that grief is only associated with having a loved one pass away, but grief can make an appearance in many different scenarios, such as:

* Divorce or romantic breakups
* Friendship breakups
* The loss of a pet
* The loss of a job
* An unexpected, life-changing health diagnosis for you or a loved one
* A traumatic event
* Financial woes
* Beginning a new life chapter and saying good-bye to the old one
* Saying good-bye to a cherished material item, such as a family home or heirlooms

No matter what life event has triggered your feelings of grief, the emotions you are feeling are completely valid, normal, and real. If you have lost something that was important to you, there is no need to feel shame for the pain you feel as you process your experiences.

# The Symptoms of Grief

Grief is a complex emotion that can take on many different shapes and forms. There are many different symptoms one may struggle with as they navigate the grieving process, both emotional and physical. These symptoms can include:

* A loss of motivation
* A loss of focus
* A loss of energy
* Changes to sleeping and eating patterns
* A [weakened immune system](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7744468/)
* A loss of interest in the things that once brought you joy
* Numbness or shock
* Despair, a deep sadness, or guilt
* Increased feelings of anxiety
* Social withdrawal
* Reduced resilience to stress

While grief can be a normal part of life, extended periods of grief or symptoms so intense they begin to impact your quality of life may be a sign that you would benefit from the help of a professional.

# The Stages of Grief

You may have heard that there are five stages in the grieving process. The stages we often associate with grief [include](https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/):

* Denial
* Anger
* Bargaining
* Depression
* Acceptance

However, it is critical to know that no two grieving processes are the same. Everybody experiences grief in their own way, on their own timetable. Your personal grieving process will be completely personal to you, depending on your lifestyle, support system, reason for grieving, and many other factors.

Regardless of how different grief can look for everybody, one thing is for sure: healing from the pain takes time. No matter what your grieving process looks like, your journey to healing is not one that can be rushed or ignored. Therefore, you must be patient and kind to yourself as your brain works its way to recovering.

# Coping with Grief

Everybody experiences grief at one point of their life or another. The emotions associated with grief can be quite difficult to navigate. Fortunately, there are a few healthy and effective coping mechanisms one can use to work through their intense emotions. These coping mechanisms include:

## Acknowledging Your Emotions as You Feel Them

Loss is a difficult experience to cope with. The pain associated with loss is often accompanied with a whirlwind of emotions. As you experience these emotions, the best thing you can do is allow yourself to acknowledge them. Your grieving process is valid, real, and extremely personal to you. One of the worst things you can do when coping with grief is to discount or ignore the emotions you are experiencing. Allow yourself to feel your feelings. It is perfectly normal to cry, not cry, feel angry, or feel little pockets of joy as you navigate your healing. Healing from grief is not linear. There will be ups and downs as you work your way through the pain.

## Figure Out Your Triggers and Create a Plan to Combat Them

There are may different events that may trigger old memories and painful emotions. Whether it is a significant date, event, or situation, planning ahead for these events will allow you to be prepared to deal with the difficult emotions you may experience with them.

## Allow Yourself Some Time to Rest

Sometimes, you just need some time to rest as you process your situation and the emotions you are navigating as you do so. There is no shame in taking some time for yourself to process your grief. Emotional and physical exhaustion is completely normal when dealing with grief and allowing yourself time to rest will ensure your brain and body are up for the healing process.

## Find a Healthy Outlet for Your Emotions

As we have already discussed, there will be a whirlwind of emotions you may experience when dealing with grief. Finding a way to express your feelings may prove to be crucial in your healing process. A few ideas for healthy outlets to release your emotions include:

* Journaling
* Talking to someone you trust
* Getting creative through art forms like painting, dancing, drawing, making music, or scrapbooking

If you have hobbies or interests that bring you joy, fight the urge to withdraw from them. Grief can often tempt us to pull away from the things that make us happy. However, this urge can make the grieving process even more difficult. Your hobbies and interests can be a great outlet for the complicated emotions associated with grief.

## Don’t Skimp on Your Self Care

When you neglect your physical health, your mental wellbeing will suffer right alongside it. This is because the two are closely intertwined, depending on one another for strength and resilience. In order to continue caring for your health and wellbeing, try not to skimp on critical self-care practices like:

* Eating enough food
* Eating nutritious foods
* Getting enough sleep
* Avoiding using alcohol and drugs to numb the pain
* Moving your body
* Doing things that bring you joy

## Lean into Your Support Network

We, as humans, are a social species. Because of this, we can often find solace in feeling supported and validated by other people. Don’t be afraid to reach out to a friend or family member to talk about your grief. Venting about your pain and frustrations can often leave one feeling as though a weight has been lifted from their shoulders.

# We Are Here for You

Coping with grief can be a difficult journey to navigate. Fortunately, you do not have to suffer alone. If you are in search of therapy for grief, our counselors are here for you. In counseling, we will offer a listening ear and work with you to navigate your feelings, develop a deeper understanding of your personal situation, and learn healthy coping mechanisms to find your way to healing.

Don’t suffer in silence. Let us help. [Contact](https://michiganpsychologicalcare.com/contact.php) us today and we will work to pair you with an experienced and compassionate counselor.

References:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7744468/>

<https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/>

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