



Grief After a Death

You and others who knew the person who died will likely grieve the death. Grief includes all the reactions you have to the death of someone or to the loss of something important.

These are some important things to know about grief:

- The type of relationship you had with the person who died and how they died can affect your grief.
- Grief can begin when you learn about the death.
- Grief can begin days, weeks, or months after you learn about the death.
- Sometimes grief can start before the person dies, especially if the person had been very sick and you knew they were going to die.
- Experiencing the sudden absence of someone you know may make you worry about where they are, which may add anxiety to your grief experience.

What Grief Might Feel Like

Grief is an individual experience. As a person with autism, you may experience grief differently than other people around you.

Differences in the way people grieve sometimes create tension within families and among friends. There are no right or wrong ways to grieve unless they cause harm to you or someone else. Here are some of the many grief reactions you may experience.

- Anger
- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Disconnection from feelings
- Sadness
- Increased emotional outbursts
- Increased sensory sensitivity
- Loneliness
- A need to spend time alone

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- A need to keep busy
- Feeling that others don't understand you
- Trouble communicating your feelings or trouble finding the right ways to express them
- Missing the person who has died
- Loss of appetite or increased appetite
- Sleeplessness or sleepiness
- Trouble concentrating
- Just not feeling like yourself
- Questions about your faith beliefs
- Relief
- Guilt
- Fear
- Difficulty coping or coping skills not helping as much
- Less energy to socialize
- Physical problems that are new and bothersome. Any physical concerns should be checked out by a doctor who knows about the death.

Grief might feel overwhelming or you may not feel anything at all. One day you could feel like nothing is different. The next day you could feel horrible. Feelings of grief may hit you suddenly and unexpectedly, even years after the death.

People Grieve Differently

People experience and show grief in different ways and for different reasons. Your grief may look and feel completely different from another person's. This is not unusual.

- Some people show a lot of emotion and others don't.
- Some people start establishing new routines or become busy with a project.
- The way a person copes with grief is known as a grieving style.
- There is no grieving style that is right or wrong.

A typical expression of grief in the neurotypical population is crying or being sad. If you aren't crying or appearing to be sad after someone dies, some people may think you aren't experiencing grief or that you don't care about the death.



This doesn't mean you need to cry or appear to be sad. It just means your expression of grief is different from theirs, and theirs is different than yours.

Grief Doesn't Have a Timeline

There is no timeline for grief. Grief is something we live with, and it changes over time.

- You may not feel grief immediately after someone dies.
- You may feel one way today and a different way tomorrow, next week, or next year.
- You may be deeply grieving today, but that grief reaction almost never lasts forever.
- There may come a time when you want to consider seeking the help of a professional grief counselor. It might be time to reach out if you:
 - find it difficult to return to your regular routine, activities, or job
 - have trouble enjoying things you used to,
 - feel very depressed, or
 - want to hurt yourself or the people around you.

You may decide, on your own or with a trusted person, when it is time to ask a professional grief counselor for help.

Grief After a Caregiver's Death

If the person who died provided you with daily support, you may have additional emotions, thoughts, or reactions to those listed above. Here are some other ways you might experience grief:

- Your first response might be devastation, uncertainty, fear, loneliness, or anxiety.
- You might think about the changes that will happen in your life. It is understandable to feel many emotions about these changes.
- You may feel overwhelmed and stressed.
- You may want to find ways to remember the person.

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If you have people you trust around you, they can help. Let them know you need help. Reach out to relatives, friends, a support person, neighbors, clergy, grief counselors, or other professionals who provide assistance to you. Let them know you're grieving and have questions about what will happen next.