

Dealing With Grief: A Guide to Understanding Your Reactions

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Program

When someone important to you dies, you grieve. This means that you may experience a wide range of responses, often over an extended period of time. The following three sections generally coincide with early, middle and later grief, though variation and overlap of these phases is common.

Grief may be somewhat familiar, or it may be a new, uncertain endeavor. It is not an easy journey and there may be times when you want more support than is available through your social network.



We have chosen the image of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey through grief. A labyrinth is not a maze as there are no dead ends and no wrong turns; There is only one way - forward. So it is with grief. The only way through is forward, with many turns and going back and forth over what seems like the same territory. We journey to the center of our grief, to the center of ourselves, and then slowly return to re-enter the world.

Each person's experience on the journey of grief will be different. This is a reflection of our personal style, our relationship with the person who died, our internal and social resources, and our past history of coping. As you journey through your own grief there will likely be unexpected turns and insights.

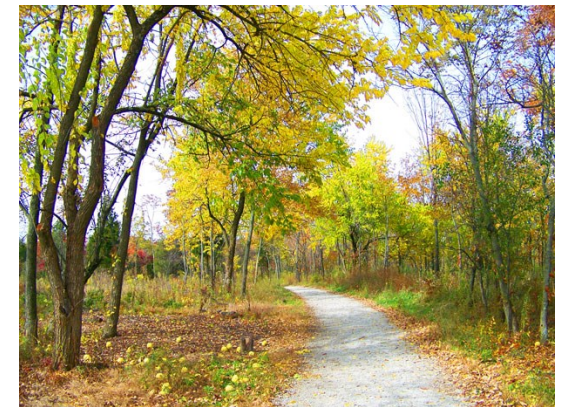


Every labyrinth is unique and special. And all labyrinths help us to move forward and 'through' our grief.



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When a Death Occurs: *Walking the Edges*

As you accept the fact of the death of someone important, you may feel shock, numbness, and disbelief that this has happened. Panic as well as strong physical and emotional reactions are common.

Social:

- Withdrawal from others
- Unrealistic expectations of self and others
- Poor judgement about relationships

Physical:

- Feelings of panic
- Digestive upsets
- Low energy, weakness and restlessness

Emotional:

- Crying, sobbing, and wailing
- Indifference and emptiness
- Outrage and helplessness

Mental:

- Confusion, forgetfulness, and poor concentration
- Denial and daydreaming
- Constant thoughts about the person who died and/or the death

Spiritual:

- Blaming God or life
- Lack of meaning, direction, or hope
- Wanting to die or join the person who died

What Helps:

- To pace yourself moment to moment
- To make no unnecessary changes
- To talk about the person and the death
- To use practical and emotional supports

Adjusting to Loss: *Entering the Depths*

Later, as the numbness subsides, you may come to deal with what this loss means to you and the emotional pain of grieving. The intensity of feeling may surprise or frighten you, but it is natural and can lessen as you move through it.

Social:

- Rushing into new relationships
- Wanting company but unable to ask
- Continued withdrawal and isolation
- Self-consciousness

Physical:

- Changes in appetite and sleep patterns
- Feelings of panic
- Digestive upsets

Emotional:

- Intense and conflicting emotions
- Magnified fear for self or others
- Anger, sadness, guilt, depression
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Mental:

- Sense of going crazy
- Memory problems
- Difficult to concentrate/understand
- Vivid dreams or nightmares

Spiritual:

- Trying to contact the person who died
- Sensing the presence of the person who died; visitations
- Continued lack of meaning

What Helps:

- To recognize and express emotions
- To acknowledge changes
- To normalize grief through knowing others experience similar responses

As Life Goes On: *Mending the Heart*

As you adjust to life without the person who died, you may begin to re-establish connections with the world around you. You have more energy for family and friends, work and other interests.

Social:

- More interest in daily affairs of self/others
- Ability to reach out and meet others
- Energy for social visits and events

Physical:

- Physical symptoms may subside
- Sleep patterns and appetite becomes more settled

Emotional:

- Emotions may become less intense
- Feeling of coming out of the fog
- More peace; less guilt

Mental:

- Increased perspective about the death
- Ability to remember with less pain
- Improved concentration and memory
- Dreams and nightmares decrease

Spiritual:

- Reconnection with religious/spiritual beliefs
- Life may come to have new meaning and purpose
- Acceptance of death as part of life cycle

What Helps:

- To reflect on progress since the death
- To begin envisioning a future
- To engage in new activities
- To establish new roles and relationships