

What Is Grief?

Grief is a bunch of feelings that occur after a loss. It is a normal, natural, and necessary process people go through in order to heal. Just about any feeling you can think of is okay to have during grief. Some common emotions include feeling:



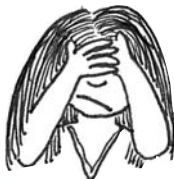
angry



sad



confused



rejected



guilty



afraid



relieved



anxious



depressed



abandoned

More Common Feelings To Have During Grief



Shock

How could this have possibly happened?

Fear and Worry

When will it end?
What happens next?
Could this also happen to me?
To someone I love?



Helplessness

This is terrible, and there's absolutely nothing I can do to fix it.

Isolation

No sense talking to anyone.
No one can possibly understand how I feel.



Hopelessness

Why should I even try to work this out?
Things are never going to get any better.



Here are some things you might not know about Grief:

Feelings of grief happen whenever people lose someone or something important to them.

That includes hopes, wishes, and dreams for the future.

Some losses happen gradually, like getting used to your best friend's news that his family is moving at the end of the school year. Or coming to realize that you'll probably never grow tall enough to be a professional basketball player.

Some losses happen suddenly. Think fires, hurricanes, or waking up to find that your hamster is no longer moving.

Some losses, like death, divorce, or serious illness, can be monumental and life changing. Others involve more every day disappointments, like losing something special, getting into a fight with a parent, or breaking up with a girlfriend or boyfriend. All of these involve loss of one kind or another. And behind and beneath every loss, you'll find **CHANGE**.

Now, **CHANGE** is an important part of life.

In fact, we can't grow without it!

But when things change, we sometimes also experience feelings of loss.

These can even come from **GOOD** changes such as:



or the



of a new brother or sister.



Can you think of other **GOOD** changes that might cause a person to feel loss?

Have **YOU** ever experienced feelings of loss?

How did you deal with them?



Besides feeling bad, Grief can also cause significant changes in behavior and overall health.

Here are a few common examples:

Significant Changes in Appetite (both up or down)



Significant Changes in Sleeping Patterns

(not being able to sleep or wanting to sleep all the time)



Feeling Unusually Anxious or Tense

Headaches



Crying

Unusual Fatigue (exhaustion)



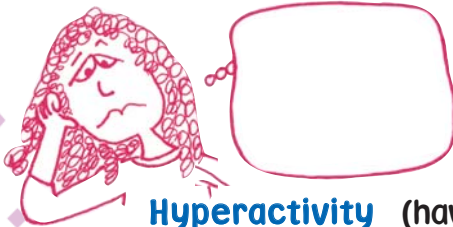
Apathy (emotional numbness; having an "I don't even care" attitude)

Unusual Mood Swings (feeling okay one minute and totally down in the dumps the next)



Low Resistance to Illness (that means getting sick easily from every germ that comes your way)

Angry Outbursts (over little things or even directed at the person or thing that was lost) People often become angry when they feel abandoned or feel that others have "let them down."



Difficulty Concentrating

Hyperactivity (having too much energy or needing to be constantly in motion)

Depression (not being able to even imagine that things might someday get any better)



Phases of Grief

The entire journey through grief can take hours, days, months, or even years.
And it's important that people —

- 1) Give themselves permission to grieve, and
- 2) Take whatever time it requires to feel better and heal.

As they grieve, people generally go through four phases, though they don't necessarily go through them in numerical (that means 1, 2, 3) order. In fact, it's possible to experience the feelings of each phase at **ANY** time.



1. Shock

During this phase, the loss is not yet “real.” Sometimes people deny it even happened. People may also feel empty, drained, disconnected, numb.



2. Reacting

Feelings here can be very strong — even painful — as things become more “real.” People tend to become preoccupied with what led up to the loss, and often need to talk about it over & over again.



3. Disruption

During this phase people may feel tired, confused, and overwhelmed as they try to go on with day-to-day living. Eventually they come to accept the loss or death as “permanent.”



4. Rebuilding

Less sadness and confusion as people slowly adjust to the many changes and begin to feel better.....more hopeful. This is a time of demonstrating courage, developing new strengths, even gaining wisdom.



“Special Days”

are holidays, birthdays, or any day that helps us remember. These times are useful for revisiting grief & celebrating memories of those we love. We can share these times with family or friends. We also can do things — like make cards or drawings — to help us remember. This is called memorialization.

How would you choose to remember loved ones on special days?

Learning to grieve well is important to living a happy and healthy life. Because if people don't, they can develop serious physical and emotional problems. Anger and depression, for example, can go “underground” temporarily, only to return later more intensely. LIFE is about changing, letting go, moving on, growing, and then changing some more.
And grief and loss aren't only about pain and sadness. They also are about changing, learning, making choices, and growing.





BEREAVEWHAT?

The Grieving Process:

Bereavement is the journey we take as we deal with the feelings associated with grief. There is no “right” way to grieve. And how long it takes and how intense it feels depends on a number of factors:

Individuality & personality

How each person understands and responds to loss and grief is different. People are unique in the way they work through their feelings. That means no two people do it exactly the same way.



How important the loss is

The loss of a distant relative might not be as painful as when a close family member moves or dies. Undergoing a new loss may also cause people to reexperience the intense feelings from previous losses.



The number of losses that happen within a period of time

A person will likely have more difficulty dealing with feelings if many losses happen within the same period of time. For example, if a person experiences the death of a family member, a move to a new school, and the loss of a pet, that person may experience more intense feelings of loss.



Other factors that affect grief are:

- * The culture we live in
- * How our own family deals with change
 - * Religious beliefs
- * How suddenly the change occurs
- * How we feel about ourselves
- * The circumstances surrounding the change



Our journey through grief is a lot like homework. If we don't do it, the homework just builds up, and then we have so much to do that it becomes overwhelming. If we deal with our grief on a daily basis then it won't build up. And we can work through the unpleasant feelings and still live a rewarding and meaningful life.



One of the things that might cause people to grieve is **TRAUMA**.

Actually, there are two types of trauma.

PHYSICAL TRAUMA refers to serious bodily injury, usually caused by an accident or act of violence. People who suffer this type of trauma are typically treated in emergency rooms. They also may need to stay in hospitals or rehab centers for a while in order to heal and regain their strength.



EMOTIONAL TRAUMA, on the other hand, refers to painful feelings brought on by **EXTREME** events. Witnessing a violent crime or surviving a catastrophic earthquake are examples of situations that could cause emotional trauma.

People who've been traumatized experience the same feelings and behavior and health changes that any grieving person might.

Only **MUCH** more intensely. And possibly for longer.

That's why it's often recommended that people speak with a professional counselor or psychologist to help them deal with their unpleasant memories and feelings.



I've heard about something called PTSD. What is that?



PTSD stands for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

It's a type of anxiety disorder that can develop after experiencing something that causes **INTENSE** feelings of fear, helplessness, or horror.



PTSD is often associated with soldiers who can't shake off the memories of battle. But it can also be brought on by witnessing or surviving terrifying events such as violent crimes or natural disasters.



PTSD involves memories of the trauma being played over and over again in a person's mind.

And sometimes when it's remembered, it's as if the person is not only recalling, but actually **reLIVING** the actual event.



PTSD symptoms can be disruptive and disabling.



Bad enough to interfere with school, work, and personal relationships.

That's why professional help in the form of counseling and sometimes medications is **STRONGLY** recommended.



Helpful Ways of Dealing With Grief and Trauma

It is helpful to remember that feelings aren't right or wrong, good or bad — they just are. Feelings don't always make sense and we can't always explain how we feel. What IS important is to simply allow ourselves to experience the feelings.

Here are some helpful ways of dealing with painful feelings:

Feel, Feel, Feel...



When we are sad, it is better to allow ourselves to feel sad instead of just thinking about it. By feeling our grief, we go through our journey, instead of around it.

Talk, Talk, Talk...



Talking to friends, family members, teachers, religious leaders, coaches, and counselors can help express feelings and make us feel less lonely. Talking can also help us think more clearly so that we're able to make better decisions about the things in our lives.

Write, Write, Write...



Putting feelings into words while keeping a diary or journal can help us understand ourselves better. Writing poetry is another good way to express feelings. We also can get a sense of how much we've grown by rereading passages and comparing how we used to feel with how we feel now.



Be Creative

Expressing ourselves through gardening, drawing, painting, music, dancing, or making something can also help us work through our feelings.



Exercise

Physical activity is a healthy way to use up the "extra energy" that comes from the anger and frustration we can feel when grieving.



Help Others

Volunteering time and energy to help others can, in turn, help us feel better too.

Grieving well is important because if anger and depression are not resolved, they can resurface later in a more intense way. Grieving well allows us to adjust to loss and change and still go on to live a full and happy life.

More Good Ways To Take Care Of Yourself — Or Someone You Care About — During Grief

Know that no matter how bad the situation is, things **CAN** get better.

Here are some additional things you can do to help:

STAY HEALTHY: It's easier to deal with painful feelings when you're in good physical health. This means trying to:



EAT RIGHT: Avoid foods and drinks that are high in caffeine or sugar. Eat a balanced diet from all of the food groups.



EXERCISE: Walk your dog, go for a jog, or do anything physical that you enjoy.



* **SLEEP WELL:** Go to bed at a regular time every night. To help you fall asleep, read a book, meditate, or listen to relaxing music.

CRY: It's healthy for both men and women to express their feelings, and crying is an excellent way to do it.



SEEK HELP: Talk with a trusted adult who can help you work through your thoughts and feelings.

TAKE BREAKS FROM THE NEWS: Like turn off the radio and TV. This will help you avoid additional trauma.



TAKE BREAKS FROM OTHERS WHO BRING YOU DOWN: You really don't need to be surrounded by more negativity right now.

SURROUND YOURSELF INSTEAD WITH POSITIVE, CARING

PEOPLE: They can help give you a sense of stability, safety, and hope.



Harmful Ways of Dealing With Grief and Trauma

Sometimes people try to escape from or push away unpleasant feelings by doing things that are harmful. If you or someone you know is dealing with feelings this way, it's important to seek help from a trusted and caring adult.



Pay Special Attention To These Warnings:

Risky Behaviors

Attempting suicide, cutting, drinking, taking drugs, not eating, over eating, and taking unnecessary risks are all examples of hurtful ways to deal with painful or unpleasant feelings.



Harming Others

Stealing, bullying, gossip, revenge, violence, taking anger out on others....all are ways we mismanage feelings.



Vandalizing

Destroying property, setting fires, and painting graffiti are other ways people sometimes express anger.



As you might guess, all of **THESE** behaviors can ultimately lead to even **BIGGER** problems.



IMPORTANT: Since feelings change all the time, suicide is a **PERMANENT** solution to a temporary problem. If you know anyone who is expressing thoughts of suicide, the most caring thing you can do (even if you've been asked to keep it a secret) is to **IMMEDIATELY** tell an adult you trust.

Dealing With Another Person's Grief

The most important thing we can do when helping someone grieve is **listen, listen, listen!** People are unique and must be allowed to express their feelings in ways that are meaningful to them.

Part of listening is respecting others. Here are some suggestions on how to be respectful with those who are grieving:



Be a Good Listener

Show that you care about them by not judging their feelings.



Be Supportive

Remember to include them in activities and call to invite them to join you — even if they have refused before. If you feel you cannot help someone who is grieving, ask an adult you trust for assistance.



Be Patient

Try not to push people through their sadness. Expecting them to hurry up and feel better will only hurt them more.

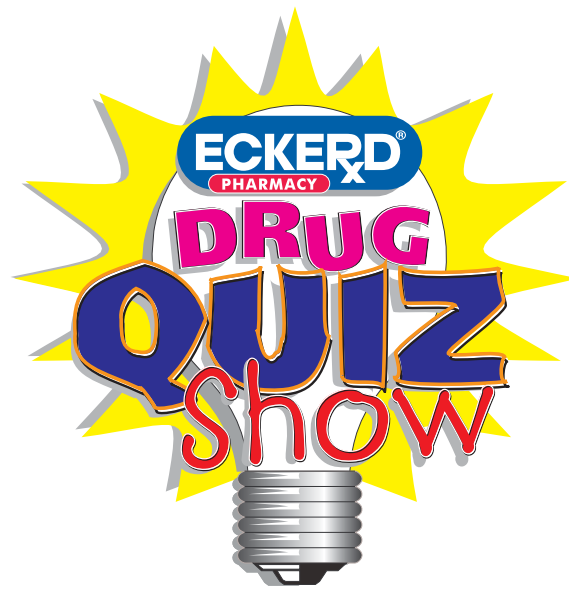


Educate Yourself

Learn as much as you can about loss and grief to understand more about what your friend or family member is going through.

Grief is like a snowflake — no two are the same. None of us will experience grief the same way. No one can tell us how to feel — it is okay to go through our journey in any way that is best for us. We all have “a story to tell” about our loss, and how we experience it is uniquely ours.





Acknowledgements

The Drug Quiz Show gratefully acknowledges
the Eckerd Pharmacy
for making possible the creation of this Learning Center.

Special thanks also go to the following individuals for their
dedication, expertise and assistance:

Concept: Mattie Bicknell, Prevention Educator

Content: Mark T. Scrivani, M.A.
Bereavement and Loss Psychotherapist

Patricia Schramm, M.S.
Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Education Program
Syracuse Diocesan Schools

Valerie Stedman, M.S., Health Educator
Christian Brothers Academy

Linda Shapess, Teacher Trainer New York Health Central
Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES

Susan Meidenbauer, Executive Director
Eckerd Drug Quiz Show

Debrah Shulman, Ph.D.
Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Education Program
Jamesville-DeWitt School District

Artists: Jennifer Pisegna, M.S., C.A.S., School Counselor
Westhill Central School District

Anthony Washington, Syracuse, NY

Graphic Design: David VanWie, Syracuse, NY

© The Drug Quiz Show, Inc. 2006
Any reproduction in whole or in part for other than not-for-profit educational purposes
can only be by written permission of The Drug Quiz Show, Inc. All rights reserved.