

Coping *with* Grief

No matter the circumstance, it's hard to move forward after losing someone important to you. Being compassionate and patient with yourself as you grieve can help you deal with the loss in a healthy way.

Grief is a natural response to loss. We all feel grief in different ways. Beyond sadness, you may feel strong emotions such as anger, shock, guilt, or loneliness. You may feel off balance in general and have a hard time focusing at work, not want to be around others, lose your appetite, or feel ill.

Healing from grief

Just as a physical wound needs time to heal, recovering emotionally from loss can take time. Grieving is not a tidy process, and sometimes it may feel like you're taking one step forward and two steps back. Some days, you may crave the company of your friends and family. Other days, you may want to be alone. In one day, you may find yourself laughing with friends and then crying when you hear a song that reminds you of your loss.

When faced with grief, you may be tempted to use alcohol or drugs to numb your pain. They can harm your health by interfering with chemicals in your brain that help you heal emotionally. Instead, coping with the loss in a healthy way can help you heal:

- Expect a range of reactions. This is normal.
- Feel free to express your emotions. Try not to push your grief away or be afraid of feeling vulnerable.
- Talking with a friend, family member or support group about your feelings may comfort you. Having someone to talk to can be especially helpful during special occasions or when something unexpected reminds you of your loss.
- Acknowledge the person you lost in a way that feels meaningful for you. For example, you may want to donate time or money to a special cause or grow a small garden as a tribute.
- When you're feeling strong emotions, exercise may help. Try going for a walk, a run or a swim.
- Channel your emotions into a hobby or special project. Gardening, painting or other activities can be calming and help you work through your grief.

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- Talk to a professional if you have been grieving for more than two weeks or if your work or family life has been affected. If you have thoughts of hurting yourself, go to a hospital or call emergency services immediately.

Grief hurts. But over time, you may notice yourself feeling bits of joy where there were once long bouts of intense, painful emotions. One day, you may feel a shift – instead of being consumed with sadness, you may think of things the person you lost did that made you smile. You may notice tiny, but positive, changes in yourself, such as looking forward to the holidays, being able to savor food again or finding a joke funny.

These changes don't mean that you're starting to forget about the person you lost and should feel guilty. Rather, you are learning how to live with your grief. As the writer Anne Lamott said of coping with grief, "It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly – that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp."