



COMMON GRIEF REACTIONS IN ADULTS

This table lists experiences common to the first several months or more of the grief process. Each person will experience a unique blend of symptoms and may not experience them all. If any of these symptoms cause significant distress or health problems (complicated grief), a physician should be consulted promptly.

<u>PHYSICAL</u>	<u>EMOTIONAL</u>	<u>MENTAL</u>
Pain Fatigue/exhaustion Low energy Sleep changes/disruption Appetite changes Shortness of breath Tight or heavy feeling in chest ("heartache") Feeling of tightness in throat Hollow feeling in stomach Stomach upset or pain Dry mouth Muscle tension or agitation Increased sensitivity to light, sound, smells, or other stimuli Clumsiness	Shock, numbness, emptiness Sadness, sorrow Loneliness, longing, yearning Anger, resentment Guilt, regret Fear, anxiety, insecurity Feeling helpless, out of control Relief Diminished self-concern Desire to join the deceased Feelings of betrayal, disloyalty Restlessness, listlessness, irritability "Emotional roller coaster"	Denial, disbelief Confusion, disorientation Absentmindedness, forgetfulness Difficulty focusing/concentrating, shortened attention span Low motivation Expecting to see or hear from deceased Preoccupation with deceased and story of the death, need to tell and retell story Dreams or images of the deceased Thinking one sees, hears, smells deceased Memories of past losses
<u>SOCIAL/FAMILIAL</u>	<u>BEHAVIORAL</u>	<u>SPIRITUAL/EXISTENTIAL</u>
Isolation from others Withdrawing from social activities Diminished desire for conversation and interaction Shifting roles in relationships New responsibilities Hiding/holding in grief out of desire to "not burden others" Difficulty relating to old friends or those who aren't grieving Losing friends, making new friends	Crying (sometimes unexpectedly) Searching Carrying mementos or holding onto deceased's belongings Going to the grave, ash-scattering site, or special places Making and keeping an altar Looking at photos or videos Listening to tapes of the deceased Talking aloud to the deceased Avoiding situations that arouse grief Staying busy to avoid emotion Assuming mannerisms of the deceased	Questions about God, higher power, Affirming spiritual beliefs Doubting religion/spiritual beliefs Questions about the deceased: Where are they now? Are they all right? Can they see me? Will I see them again? Questions about mortality, afterlife: What will happen when I die? Is there a heaven/afterlife? Existential questions: What is the meaning of my life? Have I done/said/been enough? What is my purpose now? Sensing the deceased's presence, smell, sounds in dreams or waking life (sometimes called paranormal or supernatural experiences) Awe, wonder, mystery

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WHAT WE NEED DURING GRIEF

TIME – You need time alone and time with others you trust, and who will listen when you need to talk. It takes months and years of time to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.

REST, RELAXATION, EXERCISE, NOURISHMENT, AND DIVERSION – You may need extra amounts of things you needed before. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a “cause” to work for to help others . . . any of these may give you a lift. Grief is an emotionally exhausting process. You need to replenish yourself. Follow what feels healing to you and that which connects you to the people and things you love.

SECURITY – Try to reduce or find help for financial or other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. Getting back into routine helps. You need to allow yourself to do things at your own pace.

HOPE – You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing which things helped them, and realizing that they have discovered that time does help, may give you hope that your grief will someday be less raw and painful.

CARING – Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others, even though they may be uneasy and awkward. Helping a friend or a relative also suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

GOALS – For a while, it will seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to, like playing golf with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, a trip next month – helps you get through the immediate future. At first, don’t be surprised if your enjoyment for these things isn’t the same. This is normal. As time passes, you may need to work on some long-range goals to give some structure and direction to your life. You may need guidance or counseling for help with this.

SMALL PLEASURES – Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures. Sunsets, a walk in the woods, a favorite food - - all are small steps toward regaining your pleasures in life itself.