

Common Reactions to Loss



Grief can be very painful. It can seem overwhelming and can sometimes frighten us. Many people worry about whether they are grieving in the “right” way and wonder if their feelings are normal. Of course, there is no right way to grieve, but these thoughts are natural.

If you are concerned or worried about your reaction to loss, you may want to seek counseling. However, it may help you to know that **people have many different physical and emotional reactions to grief**. If you have suffered a loss, it is common for you to:

- feel tightness in your throat or heaviness in their chest;
- have an empty feeling in your stomach and lose your appetite;
- feel restless and look for activity but find it difficult to concentrate;
- feel as though the loss isn’t real—that it didn’t happen;
- sense the loved one’s presence: for example, expect the person to walk in the door at the usual time, hear their voice or seeing their face;
- wander aimlessly or forget to finish things you have started;
- have difficulty sleeping or dream of the deceased;
- become intensely preoccupied with the life of the deceased;
- assume mannerisms or traits of the deceased;

- feel intensely angry at the deceased for leaving you;
 - feel guilty or angry over things that happened or didn’t happen in your relationship with the deceased;
 - feel a need to protect other people who seem uncomfortable with death by not talking about feelings of loss;
 - feel a need to tell, retell and remember things about the deceased and about the death experience;
 - have mood changes, such as more irritability, frustration or sadness;
 - cry at unexpected times—are surprised by the little “triggers” that set off the tears;
 - grieve longer than expected;
 - grieve both symbolic and tangible losses, not only the death; or
 - feel some identity confusion, such as loss of role as a spouse or as a child; or find that certain dates, events and stimuli bring upsurges in grief.
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Most of us are unprepared for the overwhelming response we have to a major loss. Our expectations tend to be unrealistic, and we often do not get enough assistance from friends and society. Your grief will bring an emotional intensity that will surprise you and those around you. In addition, you may experience grief in more areas and ways than you anticipated. Just remember that your reaction is natural and unique to you.