

Tips on Coping with Grief and Loss



How do you find your footing after the death of a loved one? Grief can be a stepping stone that will help you move forward, beyond your loss.

What is grief?

Grief is an organic response to loss and may affect you at many levels: emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually.

Everyone's grief is different and proceeds at its own pace. Loss causes permanent changes; you may not return to the "normal" you knew before. However, grief helps prepare you to thrive in your "new normal."

Grief is part of healing, NOT a sign of weakness or incapacity.

Who can I talk to about my grief?

Counselors, social workers and therapists. Some may have advanced training and expertise working with those who are grieving.

VA Vet Center. Offers bereavement counseling to parents, spouses and children of service members who died while on active duty. Call 202-461-6530 or email [vetcenter.bereavement@va.gov](mailto:vetercenter.bereavement@va.gov).

Military Family Support Centers.

Contact your local family support center to make an appointment with a licensed clinical counselor.

Support groups. These are often sponsored by hospitals or religious organizations.

Chaplains/clergy.



"Stages" of Grief

Some models of grief describe its emotional fluctuations as "stages." The stages are not necessarily sequential, but may help individuals to frame and identify what they are feeling at different times. Kubler-Ross' stages include:

1

Denial.

The Survivor imagines a false, preferable reality.

2

Anger.

When the Survivor recognizes that denial cannot continue (e.g. "Why me?"; "Who is to blame?").

3

Depression.

The Survivor is deeply saddened by the reality of his or her loss.

4

Bargaining.

The hope that the Survivor can avoid a cause of grief. People facing less serious trauma can bargain or seek compromise.

5

Acceptance.

Survivors embrace what has occurred and begin living into their new future.

Survivors are sometimes surprised to find themselves returning to a "stage" they thought they had completed. Grief is seldom linear. You may return to a "stage" frequently, though its emotional intensity should diminish over time.

Helping Children Grieve

It is normal for children to miss the person who died and to experience grief that might come and go with different levels of intensity for some time after the death. It can be challenging to know what to do, what to say and how to help children who are grieving.



- Answer the questions they ask, even the hard ones.
- Give children choices whenever possible.
- Talk about and remember the person who died.
- Respect differences in grieving styles.
- Listen without judgment.
- Hold a memorial service and allow for saying goodbye.
- Take a break/give a break. More than adults, children need time to disengage from grief.

For more information: <http://grievingchildren.org/grief-resources> or www.dougy.org/grief-resources/how-to-help-a-grieving-child.

Tips for Healing Through Grief

Keep a journal.

Writing helps you focus and clarify thoughts and feelings.



Be aware of others' reactions. Many people just don't know what to say when they encounter someone who is suffering. They sometimes make thoughtless statements or offer unhelpful advice to Survivors. It is important to take care of yourself; you may politely disengage from such conversations.

Get physical exercise.

There is a strong connection between physical activity and positive emotions.



Do the things you need to do for yourself. Be thoughtful and deliberate about taking opportunities and making changes.

Lower expectations for yourself.

Trying to jump right back into the life you led before your loss may actually lengthen the healing process.

Tell others what you need from them.

People around you are eager to help you and/or your family, but may hesitate until they hear from you what you really need.

Listen to your body.

Grief takes energy; rest when you need to do so.

Maintain a proper diet and sleep.

Nutrition and rest help you stay resilient.



For More Information

Contact your Navy Gold Star coordinator for more information and referrals for additional support.

Websites

- Military OneSource: http://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty/understanding-grief-and-loss?content_id=268668, <http://fullcirclegc.org/grief-resources/>.
- Newsletters, websites, facts, articles, support groups and conferences: <http://www.griefwatch.com/resources.html/>.

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