



COPING WITH GRIEF

The loss of a friend or loved one is among the most traumatic events a person can experience. The emotion of grief and the grieving process are painful, but are also natural, expected, and necessary parts of healing and recovery. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and there is no schedule or deadline for the resolution of and recovery from loss. Everybody grieves and incorporates the experience of a loss in their own way. Nevertheless, many bereaved persons share some common feelings and reactions.

Common Reactions to Loss

Emotions and Feelings

- Sadness, depression
- Feelings of helplessness
- Loss of control
- Panic
- Anxiety
- Fear of death
- Shock
- Denial
- Yearning
- Numbness
- Guilt
- Shame or remorse
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Relief
- Exaggerated startle response

Physical Symptoms

- Changes in sleep, eating patterns, and health

Changes in Behavior

- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Preoccupation with the deceased
- Avoiding reminders of the deceased
- Increased use of alcohol or substances

Changes in Activity Level

- Crying, tearfulness

Changes in Thinking

- Poor concentration
- Disorientation, confusion, forgetfulness

Factors That May Complicate Grieving

Sometimes, circumstances impact the grieving process and the responses of the bereaved. These include the age of the deceased and the circumstances of death, whether the loss was sudden or expected, and the cause of death, particularly if violence was involved (e.g. suicide, disaster, crime, etc.).

The nature and quality of the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved person is important, too. Earlier unresolved losses, whether occurring through death, parental divorce, or broken relationships, for example, may also complicate an individual's recovery.

How to Help Yourself

- **Gather information.** Develop your understanding of the grieving process. Talk with members of bereavement support organizations and clergy.
- **Participate in a ritual, and say “goodbye.”** Ceremonies and rituals help us to make the “unreal” more real and to move toward accepting and integrating our loss. Participate in USD-sponsored services or memorials.
- **Care for yourself physically.** Get adequate rest, nutrition, and exercise.
- **Care for yourself emotionally.** Give yourself permission to grieve. Allow quiet time alone to reflect and explore your thoughts and feelings. Allow time to heal without setting unrealistic goals and deadlines. If possible, delay making major life decisions while you are grieving.
- **Express your feelings.** Allow opportunities to express the full range of your emotions. This includes sadness, but also perhaps, fear, guilt, anger, resentment, and relief. Avoiding emotions through excessive activity, denial, or abuse of substances complicates and prolongs the pain of loss.
- **Seek support.** Support from others reduces isolation and loneliness and increases a sense of security and safety. Talk to friends openly about your loss. If religion or spirituality are important to you, talk with a member of the clergy or a spiritual advisor. Consider joining a support group for people who have experienced a similar loss.
- **Consider seeking professional help,** particularly if your grief undermines your everyday functioning at school, home, or work.

How to Help A Friend

- **Talk openly to your friend** about their loss and feelings. Don’t try to offer false cheer or minimize the loss.
- **Be available.** Call, stop by to talk, or share a meal or activity. Your presence and companionship are important.
- **Listen and be patient.** Listening is an often overlooked gift you can provide. Allow your friend to vent. Don’t judge their thoughts or feelings. Don’t feel you need to offer advice - listening itself is very powerful and comforting.
- **Take some action.** Send a card, write a note, call. This is important not just immediately after the loss, but especially later, when grief is still intense but when others may have resumed their daily lives and support for your friend may dwindle.
- **Encourage self-care.** Encourage your friend to care for themselves physically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. Encourage your friend to seek out support and/or professional help, if appropriate.
- **Accept your own limitations.** Accept that you cannot eliminate the pain your friend is experiencing. Grief is a natural, expected response to loss and each person must work through it in their own way and pace. Be supportive, but care for yourself, too.

Resources

USD Resources

Wellness on-call counselor (24/7 support)

- Call (619) 260-4655, and press “1”

Timely Care

- 24/7 virtual mental health care

Be Well USD

- [Talk to Someone Now](#)
- [USD Faculty/Staff EAP support](#)
- [Coping with Grief and Loss](#)

Local and National Resources

National Suicide Crisis Line

- 988

San Diego County Access and Crisis Line

- (888) 724-7240

National Alliance of Mental Illness Warmline

- (619) 295-1055

[Grief support groups](#)