

Healing After Loss

When someone close to us dies it can be very painful, and although loss is a universal human experience, it can feel frightening, overwhelming and at times lonely. The initial weeks to months can be filled with things that need to be done (such as funeral arrangements) and the support of family and friends. Often it's not until this has subsided that the extent of a person's grief is experienced.

Many people described grief as being like a wave or rollercoaster, with ups and downs. Surges of grief are all part of the process and do not represent a step backward.

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.

At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me.

C.S. Lewis

What to expect

Grief is different for different people, and no two people grieve in the same way. Common emotional reactions to grief include sadness, anger, regret, relief, anxiety and fear. Many people have difficulties with concentration, decision making and memory problems. This can be an unexpected and very unsettling aspect of grief, but it usually passes with time. Grief also has an impact on physical health, sleep and appetite. Questioning one's faith or a renewal of faith may also follow a death. Many people hope that they will feel more connected with family and friends and be able to share their experience of grief together. Often times, people grieve in different ways and it can be a struggle to understand the coping style of other's who are also grieving.



“Only people who are capable of loving strongly can also suffer great sorrow, but this same necessity of loving serves to counteract their grief and heals them.”

Leo Tolstoy



What helps

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief does not progress in stages as previously thought. “Letting go” or “moving on” is not necessary, rather adjusting to a life without the person physically present. Coping with grief often involves two experiences: being with the emotional loss (sadness, yearning, remembering the past) and adapting to the future (responsibilities associated with the death, learning to do tasks without the person who has died, adjusting to a different type of ‘normal’). Both of these experiences are types of grieving. Moving and oscillating between these two experiences can be helpful way to provide space for the loss and also permission for some things to be different.

Grief doesn't necessarily go away, but over time most people find a way to be with their grief and remember the person who died. This may take longer than you would like and people around you may suggest that you need to “move on”. This is never helpful. Grief cannot be rushed and the impact of a significant loss cannot be undermined. Grief and love are the opposite sides of the same coin.

Each individual is usually the best judge of what is right for them. It is most helpful to grieve in whatever way feels most comfortable for you.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and utilising support networks may also help. Often people don't know how to support someone who is grieving, so it's ok to tell them what you need. Planning for significant events (e.g., birthdays, religious celebrations and anniversaries) can also assist with the anticipation surrounding these dates, and provide an opportunity to acknowledge and remember the person who has died. Most people will manage over time, but for some counselling can also help. Counselling can provide the space and opportunity to explore thoughts, feelings and memories associated with the death, in a way that may not be possible within your own support systems.