

Grief is not a sign of weakness...

but a tribute to the loved one who died and a healthy response to our heartache. Clinging to grief prolongs pain. Avoiding grief postpones recovery. Neither approach helps us heal.



12 Steps in the Grief Process

1. Recovery from a loved one's death requires more than time.

- If we allow ourselves the time to mourn, we can gradually break grief's grip on us.
- Recognizing the role and value of the grieving process orients us to accepting the fact of the death.
- Acceptance marks a major step toward recovery.

2. Grief is universal; Grievers are distinctive.

- Grieving follows a pattern, but each griever experiences it differently.
- Awareness of the basic pattern reveals common ground for mutual help and support.
- Recognition of uniqueness enables grievers to help themselves, guides sympathizers in what to say and do.

3. Shock initiates us into mourning.

- We go numb when someone we love dies.
- We feel stunned, in a trance.
- This is nature's way of cushioning us against tragedy.
- The length and depth of this state varies according to our relationship, the cause of death, whether it was sudden or expected, etc.
- Shock allows us time to absorb what has happened and to begin to adjust.
- The guidance of caring people can sustain new grievers.
- As numbness wears off and acceptance grows, we regain control of our lives.

4. Grief causes depression.

- Grievers typically, but in varying degrees, experience loneliness and depression. This pain, too, will pass.
- Being alone need not result in loneliness. Reaching out to others is a key way to lessen loneliness and to overcome depression.

5. Grief is hazardous to our health.

- The mental and emotional upset of a loss by death causes physical distress and vulnerability to illness.
- Grievers sometimes neglect healthy nourishment and exercise, and may overindulge in drinking, smoking or medication.
- We might need a doctor's advice in regard to our symptoms, their causes and their treatment.

6. Grievers need to know they're normal.

- The death of a loved one makes the future very uncertain.
- We might panic in the face of the unknown and fear life without the one who died.
- Panic prevents concentration and defers acceptance of the finality of death.
- It tempts us to run from life, to avoid people and to refuse to try new things.
- We might even think we're going crazy.
- Patience with ourselves and a willingness to accept help enable us to subdue panic and outgrow its confusion.

7. Grievers suffer guilt feelings.

- Many blame themselves after a loved one's death, for the death itself or for faults in the relationship. We have all made mistakes and sincere regret is the best response to them. However, self-reproach out of proportion to our behavior affects our mental health and impedes our recovery.
- Close friends or a trusted counselor can aid us in confronting and dealing with guilt feelings, whether justified or exaggerated.

8. Grief makes people angry.

- People in grief naturally ask: "Why?" "Why him?" "Why me?" "Why now?" "Why like this?"
- Most of these questions have no answers. Frustration then causes us to feel the resentment and anger.
- We want someone to blame: God, doctors, clergy, ourselves, and even the one who died.

- If we can accept the lack of answers to "Why?", we might begin to ask, instead, what can we do now to grow through what has happened.
- Then we have started to move beyond anger and toward hope.

9. Emotional upheaval characterizes grievers.

- A loved one's death disrupts emotional balance.
- The variety and intensity of feelings seem overwhelming.
- Other grievers and counselors can help us interpret and deal with these feelings.
- As we come to understand what we experience, we can find appropriate ways to ventilate our emotions and to channel them constructively.

10. Grievers often lack direction and purpose.

- At times in the grieving process, a kind of drifting occurs. Mourners find familiar and necessary activities difficult.
- We prefer to daydream about what was or fantasize about what might have been.
- If we can foster gratitude for the past and begin to assess our potential for the future, this will prove to be a passing phase, not a permanent state.

11. Healing brings hope to grievers.

- It takes time and effort, but gradually hope dawns for bereaved people.
- We learn to express emotions without embarrassment or apology.
- We cherish memories, bittersweet though they are.
- We begin to feel concern for and show interest in others.
- We make decisions and assume responsibility for ourselves.
- The example of other recovered grievers helps us discover and develop our own potential.

12. Survivors reaffirm themselves and choose life.

- Eventually, grievers recognize and embrace a healing truth:
Grief had changed me, but has not destroyed me. I've discovered new things about myself. I can build on strengths developed through adversity. I'm no longer my "old self", but I'm still me. I face the future with confidence. Life is worth living because I can love and be loved.