

When a Loved One Dies

Coping with Loss

You have lost someone you love. The pain of such a loss can be quite intense, as death is one of the most emotional of experiences. It can sometimes feel as if recovery is impossible, but it is not. Though it may be difficult to hear, dealing with death is a skill that most of us will eventually have to develop.

How death affects you

How deeply you feel your loss will depend on your relationship with the person who is gone. Grief is normal and some sense of loss may always be there. After the death, you feel numb, as if a bomb had been dropped on you. You may find making decisions difficult in the beginning. Confusion and forgetfulness may also occur, as may anxiety and, of course sadness. Upon first learning the news you may experience physical symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and headaches.

It may take several weeks or longer to return to relative normality in your life. The length of time for recovery will vary from person to person, so please refrain from comparing yourself to other people.

You may think all kinds of thoughts and come to many different conclusions. You may feel alone and afraid. You may think your life will never be the same. You may also start to feel guilt, as if you have let someone down. You may tell yourself that had I acted more quickly things would be different. None of those thoughts is usually true. That is why it is so important to talk to others during this time.

All of these feelings, and more, will come over you, and they are normal. How long you feel them and how long it takes you to find answers is up to you. Accepting the loss and growing through the grief process takes time and work. When you emerge at the other end, you will feel the loss but with more peace and the knowledge that you can carry on.

Different kinds of loss

Research has found that sudden tragic deaths and the death of a young person are often hardest to accept.

The death of one's spouse can feel devastating because one is losing one's best friend, roommate, lover, and possibly the parent of one's children.

The death of an older person – particularly a parent – can have associated relief, which can serve as an inappropriate source of guilt.

Older adults, over time experience so much loss that sadness and depression can become a factor in their lives, as they are faced with their mortality almost each time they lose a friend, relative or acquaintance.

If you need help, call
1-888-321-4433



When to seek help

Talking to friends and relatives about your loss is healing. It helps to go on remembering the person with someone else who also loved them. Reading books about grief, facing the pain through acceptance, talking to your clergy, or joining a support group can help. Seek professional assistance if you or trusted others sense that you are dealing with the loss in an unhealthy manner or if you believe you are not making any progress towards emotional recovery. If you do not allow yourself to grieve, years later your life can be out of control and you'll need to go back and face that death. Substituting alcohol or other drugs, overeating, and other negative habits are not acceptable coping mechanisms. Professional help can move you along the road to acceptance.

Tips for helping the survivor

- Listen, say little
- Avoid cliches
- Be there for the long haul, not just the funeral
- Include them in the first holidays after the loss
- Remember the anniversary of the death in a special way (a call, card, or flower)
- Love them, accept them