



ABOH  
GRIEF & LOSS

# Finding Light in the Darkness: Navigating the Journey of Grief

*Blog Post*

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Grief is a normal reaction to loss. It encompasses the emotional turmoil you experience when something or someone you cherish is no longer present. The anguish of loss can often feel unbearable. You might encounter a range of challenging and unforeseen emotions, including shock, anger, disbelief, guilt, and deep sadness.

The anguish of grief can impact your physical well-being, leading to challenges in sleeping, eating, or even maintaining clear thoughts. These responses to loss are completely natural, and as the magnitude of the loss increases, so too will the intensity of your grief.

Dealing with the loss of someone or something dear to you is among life's greatest challenges. While grieving is often linked to bereavement—the passing of a loved one, which typically triggers the most profound sorrow—any form of loss can lead to feelings of grief.

The primary sources of grief include:

1. Grieving the death of a loved one.
2. Mourning the loss of a pet.
3. Experiencing a divorce or relationship separation.
4. Suffering a decline in health.
5. Facing job loss.
6. Dealing with financial instability.
7. Enduring a miscarriage.
8. Transitioning into retirement.
9. Letting go of a cherished aspiration.
10. Coping with a serious illness in a loved one.
11. Experiencing the end of a friendship.
12. Losing a sense of safety following a traumatic event.
13. Parting with the family home.

## Myths and facts about grief and grieving

*Myth:*

**The pain will go away faster if you ignore it**

Fact:

Avoiding your pain or suppressing it will ultimately exacerbate the situation over time. To truly heal, it is essential to confront your grief and actively engage with it.

*Myth:*

**It's essential to remain resilient when confronting loss.**

Fact:

Experiencing sadness, fear, or loneliness is a natural response to loss. Remember, crying is not a sign of weakness. You don't have to shield your family or friends by pretending to be strong. Expressing your genuine emotions can be beneficial for both you and them.

*Myth:*

**If you don't shed tears, it may suggest that you aren't feeling remorseful about the loss.**

Fact:



Crying is a natural reaction to sadness, but it's not the sole expression of it. Individuals who don't cry can experience the same level of pain as others; they may just have different ways of demonstrating their feelings.

*Myth:*

**Grieving should last about a year.**

*Fact:*

There is no set duration for the grieving process; the length of time it takes varies from individual to individual.

*Myth:*

**Moving on with your life means forgetting about your loss.**

*Fact:*

Moving forward signifies that you have come to terms with your loss, yet it does not equate to forgetting. You can continue with your life while cherishing the memory of someone or something you have lost as a significant part of who you are. In fact, as we journey through life, these memories often become increasingly essential in shaping our identity.



# The grieving process

Grieving is a deeply personal journey; there is no correct way to experience it. Your grieving process is influenced by various factors, such as your personality and coping mechanisms, life experiences, beliefs, and the significance of the loss to you.

Naturally, the grieving process requires time. Healing occurs gradually; it cannot be rushed or forced, and there is no standard timeline for grief. Some individuals may begin to feel better within weeks or months, while for others, it may take years. Regardless of how you experience grief, it's crucial to be gentle with yourself and allow the process to unfold at its own pace.

## Navigating the Grieving Process

Although grieving is an unavoidable part of life, there are strategies to help manage the pain, come to terms with your feelings, and eventually find a way to rebuild and move forward with your life.

1. Recognize and validate your pain.
2. Embrace the fact that grief can evoke a wide range of unexpected emotions.
3. Appreciate that your journey through grief is uniquely yours.
4. Reach out for in-person support from those who genuinely care about you.
5. Nurture your emotional well-being by prioritizing your physical health.
6. Be aware of the distinction between grief and depression.

## The 5 stages of grief

In 1969, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced the concept known as the "five stages of grief." These stages were derived from her research on the emotions experienced by patients with terminal illnesses. However, many individuals have since applied these stages to various negative life changes and losses, including the death of a loved one or the end of a relationship.

### The 5 stages of grief are:

Denial: "This isn't happening to me."

Anger: "Why is this occurring? Who can I hold responsible?"

Bargaining: "If you prevent this from happening, I promise to \_\_\_\_."

Depression: "I feel too low to take any action."

Acceptance: "I've come to terms with what has transpired."

If you find yourself grappling with emotions after a loss, it's important to recognize that your reactions are entirely natural and that healing will come with time. However, it's essential to understand that not everyone experiences all the stages of grief, and that's

perfectly okay. Contrary to popular belief, you don't have to navigate each stage in a specific order to achieve healing.

In fact, some individuals may resolve their grief without going through any of these stages at all. If you do find yourself experiencing these stages, it's likely that they won't occur in a tidy, sequential manner. So, try not to stress about what you "should" be feeling or which stage you believe you should be in.

Kübler-Ross, the originator of these stages, never intended for them to serve as a strict framework for everyone who mourns. In her final book before her passing in 2004, she remarked about the five stages of grief: "They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is no typical response to loss, just as there is no typical loss. Our grieving is as personal as our lives."

Grief can be likened to a roller coaster—filled with ups and downs. Initially, the ride may be particularly turbulent, with deeper and prolonged lows. Over time, the intensity of the difficult moments should decrease, although it takes time to navigate through a loss. Even years later, during significant events like a family wedding or the birth of a child, feelings of grief may still resurface.

Symptoms of grief can manifest in various ways, and while each person's experience is unique, many may encounter the following signs:

### **Emotional Symptoms of Grief:**

- **Shock and disbelief:** Following a loss, it can be challenging to accept what has occurred. You may feel numb, struggle to believe that the loss is real, or even deny the truth. For instance, if a pet or loved one has passed, you might find yourself anticipating their return despite knowing they are gone.
- **Sadness:** Profound sadness often emerges as a universal symptom of grief, bringing feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or loneliness. You may find yourself crying frequently or feeling emotionally unstable.
- **Guilt:** Regret or guilt might surface regarding things you did or didn't say or do. Feelings of relief after a prolonged illness can also bring guilt, as can the belief that you could have done more to prevent the loss, even when it was beyond your control.
- **Fear:** A significant loss can trigger feelings of anxiety, helplessness, or insecurity about the future. If you've lost a partner, job, or home, you may experience panic attacks or fears regarding your own mortality and facing life without that person.
- **Anger:** Even if no one is to blame for the loss, you might feel anger towards yourself, God, medical professionals, or the deceased for leaving you behind. The desire to assign blame for the injustice you feel is common.





### Physical Symptoms of Grief:

Grief isn't solely an emotional journey; it can also lead to physical challenges such as:

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Weakened immune response
- Changes in weight
- Bodily aches and pains
- Insomnia

### Types of Grief and Loss:

Since the grieving experience is highly personal, it's difficult to categorize grief as strictly "normal" or "abnormal." However, there are forms of grief that may fall outside the typical responses outlined above:

- **Anticipatory Grief:** This type of grief arises before a significant loss occurs. If a loved one is terminally ill or you face imminent job loss, you may begin grieving prior to the actual event. While it can bring confusion and anger, anticipatory grief can also provide an opportunity to prepare for your loss, resolve unfinished matters, or say goodbye.
- **Alienated Grief:** Disenfranchised grief occurs when a loss is undervalued, stigmatized, or cannot be openly mourned. Losses such as a job, pet, or friendship may be minimized by others. You may feel isolated if you experience a miscarriage or lose someone to suicide. This type of grief can be compounded when your relationship with the deceased isn't recognized, making it harder to navigate your feelings.

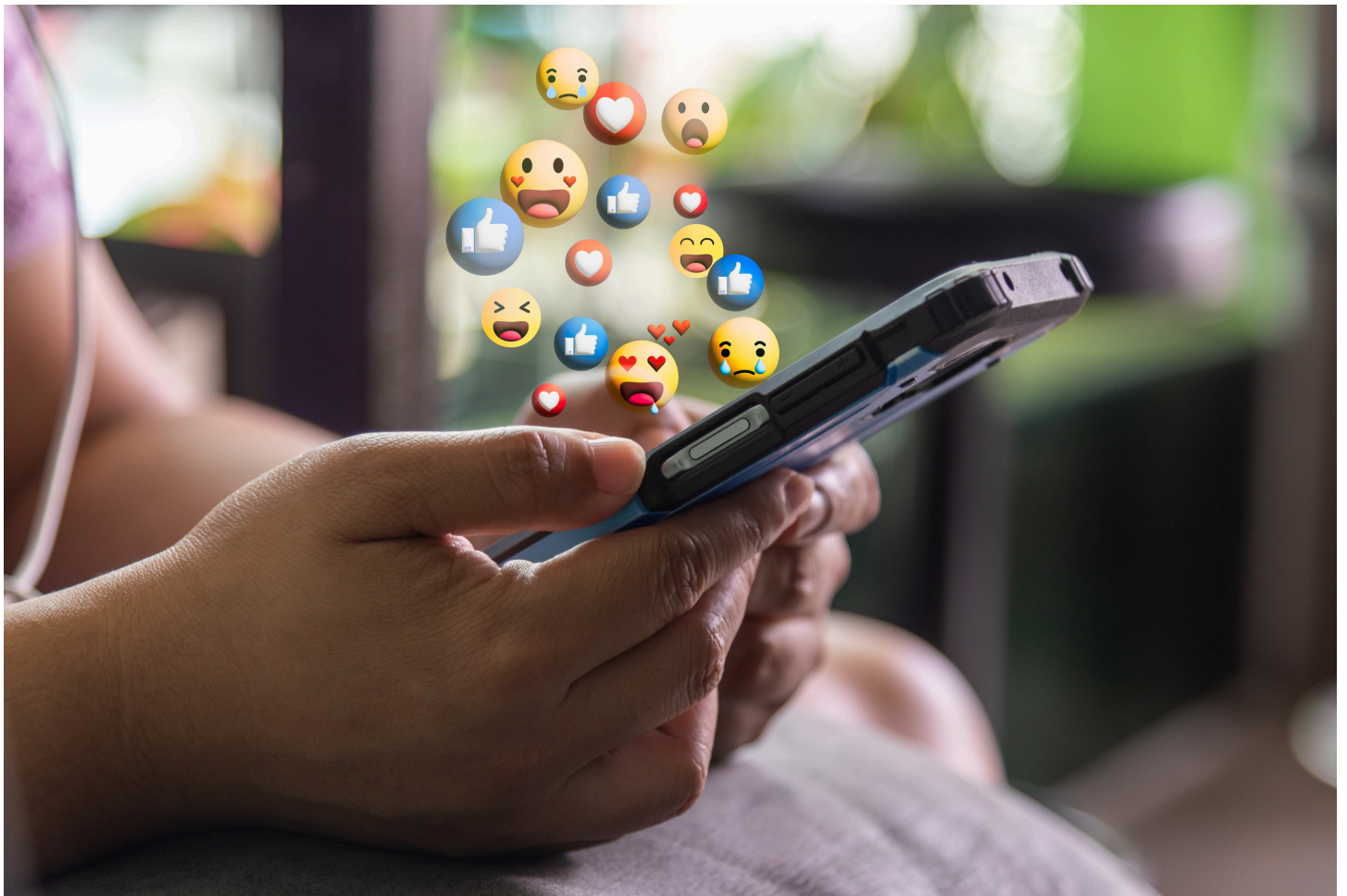
- **Complicated Grief:** Pain from a significant loss may linger indefinitely, but it should soften over time. If grief remains overwhelming and prevents you from returning to daily life or relationships, it may indicate complicated grief. This often arises from the death of a loved one, leaving you feeling stuck in mourning. If unresolved grief continues to haunt you, seeking support is crucial for healing.

### **Finding Support for Grief and Loss:**

While the pain of grief may tempt you to withdraw, the face-to-face support of others is essential for healing. Even if discussing your feelings isn't comfortable for you, expressing them during this time is important.

- **Lean on friends and family:** Now is the moment to draw strength from those who care about you. Spend quality time together, accept offers of help, and communicate your needs—whether it's a listening ear or companionship. If you lack regular connections, consider building new friendships.
- **Understand that others may feel awkward:** Many people find it challenging to comfort someone in grief, especially if they haven't faced similar losses. They may fear saying the wrong thing. However, don't let this deter you from engaging with them; their outreach indicates they care.
- **Seek solace in your faith:** If you belong to a religious community, embrace the comfort its rituals provide. Spiritual practices, such as prayer or meditation, can offer support. If you're questioning your faith, consider talking to clergy or members of your community.
- **Join a support group:** Grief can feel isolating, even with loved ones around you. Sharing your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses can be helpful. Look for bereavement support groups in your area through local hospitals, hospices, or counseling centers.
- **Consult a therapist or grief counselor:** If grief feels unbearable, consider seeking a mental health professional experienced in grief counseling. They can guide you through intense emotions and help you navigate the grieving process. If in-person therapy isn't feasible, explore online therapy options.



**Be Cautious with Social Media:**

While social media can help you connect with others about your loss, it can also attract negative comments. To minimize additional pain, consider limiting your social media activity to closed groups rather than public posts.

**Taking Care of Yourself While Grieving:**

During this challenging time, it's crucial to prioritize your well-being. The stress of loss can drain your energy and emotional resources. Caring for your physical and emotional health will help you endure.

- **Acknowledge your feelings:** Avoiding grief is impossible. To heal, you must confront the pain. Suppressing emotions only prolongs the grieving process and can lead to complications like depression or anxiety.
- **Express your feelings creatively:** If discussing your loss is hard, consider journaling your thoughts or creating a scrapbook to release your emotions.
- **Maintain hobbies and interests:** Engaging in activities that bring you joy can help you cope with your loss and support your healing process.
- **Honor your unique feelings:** No one can dictate how you should feel, so allow yourself to experience your emotions without judgment. It's normal to feel anger, sadness, or even moments of joy as you navigate your grief.
- **Prioritize physical health:** The mind and body are interconnected. Taking care of your physical needs—getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising—can bolster your emotional resilience. Avoid using substances to numb the pain or artificially elevate your mood.



- Prepare for grief triggers: Anniversaries, holidays, and significant milestones may bring back painful memories. Anticipate these moments and know that it's normal to feel overwhelmed. Plan ahead to ensure you're not alone or find meaningful ways to honor your loss.

Looking for a support group near you? Grief Share is a great place to [start](#) or check out our [global helplines](#) for more support