

Caregiver's Guide to Grief & Loss

What Is Grief?

Grief comes in all shapes and sizes. There is **no right or wrong way to grieve**. Grief is a natural response to death or loss, and how we grieve may be impacted by culture, religion, and available support. For some, death is very scary, while for others it is a natural process.

Healthy grieving is possible and encouraged!

What Causes Grief?

- Death of a loved one
- Sexual or physical violence
- Serious health diagnosis
- Relationship loss:
 - Caregiver in jail
 - Child placed in care (protective custody, foster)
 - Divorce

Signs You or Someone You Love May Be Experiencing Grief & Loss:

What Grief May Look Like¹:

- Sensitivity and irritability
- Trouble sleeping or nightmares
- Physical symptoms without a clear cause (headaches, stomachaches)
- Unusual or over-dependence on caregiver
- Difficulty concentrating
- Social withdrawal
- Emotional numbness or dissociation, or displays of extreme emotions
- Unexpected or new fears relating to their experience of loss or grief

What Grief May Feel Like²:

- Self-blame
- Difficulty remembering
- Remuniating on past
- Mistrust of others
- Denial of loss
- Feelings of: emptiness, sadness, shock, anger, longing, disbelief
- Lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Grief of yourself, can look like the desire to go back to "who I was before", or "be my old self again"



Advice for Caregivers:

Connect & Support

Reach out for help from a trusted friend or professional. Make time to connect with caring and supportive family, community or friends.

Time

Allow yourself enough time and room to grieve. As everyone reacts differently to loss, there is no "normal" grieving period. Your emotional health is important, and knowing your bereavement options and rights can help the healing process.

Self-care

Take care of your physical health, and look for any signs of stress or illness. Be kind to yourself and make time to do the things you enjoy.

Accept

Recognize that your life has changed. You may feel less engaged with work or relationships for some time. This is a natural response to grief, be kind to yourself and your child as you heal.

Suggested Reading:

Information on Childhood Grief:

www.childrengrieve.org/resources/about-childhood-grief

Toolkit for Grieving Children & Teens:

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/5229bd5d-3bbe-460d-9558-e3fcdd327194>

Grief Activity Cards for Young Kids:

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/59d145d4-3a30-4a22-8ca9-325b47d6a9d2>



Myths About Grief³

Don't Feel Bad

Even though grief and all of its emotions are normal and natural, we have been told many times not to express how we feel. Feeling bad is a normal response to loss, and we must let ourselves feel the full range of our emotions without the need to cover them up or "get over it." All our feelings are valid, while some actions are not, meaning we cannot control 'how' we feel, but we can control 'how' we deal with it!

Grief is Private

Many people who grieve tend to isolate themselves because "you don't want to burden others with your feelings." Communicating the truth about how you feel is one of the healthiest things you can do for yourself when you're grieving.

Replacement

Relationships with our family members, spouses, children, friends, and even our beloved pets are not replaceable. It is vital that you create space for yourself to grieve in order to move forward in the healthiest way possible.

Adult Grief Programs:

Pilgrims Hospice - Grief Services

<https://pilgrimshospice.com/>

- Free to participate
- Up to 10-week bereavement programs
- Offers both individual and group counselling
- Offers both drop-in and pre-registered grief programs
- "Guided imagery, expressive-arts-based techniques, and relaxation techniques can be integrated into counselling upon request."

Grief Programs for All:

Heal My Heart - Grief & Trauma Healing Centre in Edmonton

<https://www.healmyheart.ca>

- Offers both face to face and online counselling services
- Wide range of therapies: individual, group, child & teen, and couples & family

Their Approach to Grief:

- Grief is key to growth and change: encourage accepting and owning your pain, and building healthy relationships.
- Healing the body, mind, spirit, and emotions leads to freedom.

Additional Resources:

Understanding & Coping With Grief:

<https://edmonton.cmha.ca/documents/grieving/>

<https://www.chpca.ca/resource/grief-and-bereavement-resource-repository/>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm>

Coping With Loss of a Loved One:

<https://www.apa.org/topics/families/grief>

Coping With a Serious Diagnosis:

www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/grief-and-loss

Bereavement Leave:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/workplace/federal-labour-standards/leaves.html>



Sources:

1 <https://connectability.ca/2020/08/20/childrens-grief-and-loss/>

2 <https://myhopewell.com/therapy-services/individual-therapy/grief-loss/>

3 <https://www.healmyheart.ca/>