

Coping with Grief

SupportLinc Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Penn State Health



Disclaimer

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Objectives

This training is designed to help you:

- Identify the different types of grief
- Discuss different kinds of loss and how they can impact you
- Recognize possible reactions to distressing events
- Learn about the grieving process and ways to cope with grief

Grief is ever changing

“Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim.”

- Vicki Harrison



What is grief?

Grief is a:

- Natural and universal emotional response to loss
- Normal part of living
- Highly individualized process depending on the nature of the loss
- Emotional opposite of the positive feelings previously caused by the person or thing that is lost

Loss of a loved one

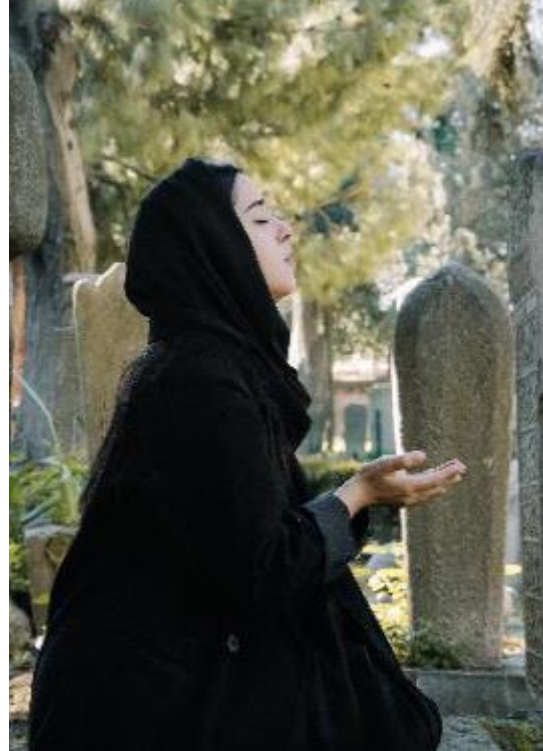
- Often the most traumatic and significant source of loss and grief
- The grieving process of the lost loved one reflects our relationship with them
- Untimely loss can compound feelings of grief
- Often causes irreversible changes to many aspects of life

Other losses that can lead to grief

- Divorce or breakup
- Loss of health
- Loss of a job
- Loss of financial stability
- Infertility
- Miscarriage
- Retirement
- Death of a pet
- Loss of a dream
- A loved one's serious illness
- Loss of a friendship
- Loss of safety after trauma
- Selling the family home

Types of grief

- “Normal grief”
- Anticipatory grief
- Disenfranchised grief
- Absent grief
- Complicated grief (chronic, delayed or distorted)
- Cumulative grief



Individual process



People grieve differently based on:

- Personality
- Type of loss
- Coping style
- Life experience
- Religion / faith

There is no timeline for grief.

Grief versus complicated grief after loss

Common reactions

- Emptiness
- Guilt
- Shame

Grief

- Moves in and out of “stages” (such as shock or numbness, depression, anger, bargaining, and acceptance)
- May experience trouble eating and sleeping (either not enough or too much)
- Sadness and longing
- Guilt or blame
- “If only” or “what if” thoughts

Complicated grief

- Feels “fresh” or “raw” long after the loss
- Feelings of yearning and avoidance that interfere with adaptation
- Intense preoccupation and negative thoughts
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Loss of interest or pleasure related to the loss

This may signal that it's time to get help



Myths and facts about grief and grieving

Myth: The pain will go away faster if you ignore it.

Fact: Trying to ignore your pain will only make it worse in the long run until you are able to cope and heal.

Myth: It's important to “be strong” in the face of loss.

Fact: Feeling sad, frightened or lonely is a normal reaction to loss.

Myth: If you don't cry, it means you aren't sorry about the loss.

Fact: Crying is a normal response to sadness, but it's not the only one.

Myth: Grieving should last about a year.

Fact: There is no specific time frame for grieving, since it is a very individualized process.

Myth: Moving on with your life means forgetting about your loss.

Fact: Moving on means you've accepted your loss—but that's not the same as forgetting. You can move forward with your life and keep the memory of someone or something you lost as an important part of you.



Stages of grief

Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

Ways to process grief



Ways to cope

- Acknowledge your pain.
- Accept that grief can trigger many different and unexpected emotions.
- Understand that your grieving process will be unique to you.
- Support yourself emotionally by taking care of yourself physically.
- Recognize the difference between grief and depression.
- Remember that you are not alone.
- Understand that your feelings are normal and valid. Accept your emotions.
- Remember to be gentle with yourself.
- Talk about it when you can.
- Preserve memories to honor the person you love.
- Seek out face-to-face support from people who care about you. You can also talk with a therapist to help you learn coping techniques and ways to heal in a safe space.

Deep breathing



Practice exercise

Interactive toolkits

Grief and Loss

(www.griefandloss.tools)

Equip yourself with knowledge, support and the right tools to discover a way to live with grief and move forward.

Mindfulness

(www.mindfulness.tools)

Practical tools and exercises for incorporating mindfulness into everyday life.

Meditation

(www.meditate.tools)

Easy-to-use collection of resources that includes guided meditations, tip sheets and more.

Resiliency

(www.resiliency.tools)

Skill development resources to help you ‘bounce back’ from challenging situations.

Sleep fitness

(www.sleepfitness.tools)

Information and resources to help you learn good sleep habits and achieve healthy sleep.

What is SupportLinc?

The SupportLinc Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a health benefit, separate from your medical insurance, offered by your employer to help you manage life's daily challenges.

SupportLinc can refer you to professional counselors, services and resources that will help you and your eligible family members resolve a broad range of personal and work-related concerns.

What services are included?

Work-life benefits



Legal consultation

Free in-person or telephonic consultation with a licensed attorney

No employment law



Dependent care referrals

Expert referrals to child and adult/elder care providers, facilities and other resources



Financial consultation

Expert guidance and consultation from financial professionals



“Convenience” referrals

Guidance and referrals to a variety of daily living resources: home improvement, entertainment services, pet care, auto repair, wellness, travel, handymen, volunteer opportunities etc.



Identity theft consultation

Free consultation with an identity theft recovery professionals

Tailored recovery action plan

Getting started



Call: 1-888-881-LINC (5462)



QR Code:



Visit: www.supportlinc.com



Log in or create account
(code: psh)

SupportLinc

Support for everyday issues. Every day.

Additional resources

Grieving a loss, whether it is a loved one, a family member, a friend or a co-worker, is difficult and painful. When we lose someone close to us, we go through a process of grieving and mourning. When the loss is sudden or tragic, that process can be made even more difficult. As we go through the grieving process, it important to recognize it and know the ways to best help yourself get through it.

The grief process

The feelings and symptoms of grief can take on many different forms and is unique for each of us. There is no right or wrong way to feel, and there is no specific rule that says you have to finish grieving after a certain time. The important thing is that you take the time you need to go through the various stages of grief, and to be able to acknowledge your feelings along the way.

There are generally five stages of grief that we go through when we have a loss. We don't go through the stages in any particular order, and there is no time limit as to how long a person may experience each stage. The stages are:

Denial: Someone in this stage is in shock and disbelief about the loss. They are unable to acknowledge the loss and may try to ignore it or pretend that nothing has happened. This stage can help protect a person from the immediate intensity of the loss.

Bargaining: In this stage, a person may focus on ways they could have prevented the loss, or on what they might have done differently. Sometimes a person will try to make a deal with someone or something in the belief that those actions can be undone. Feelings of guilt are common in this stage.

Anger: At this point, a person begins to realize the lack of control and power they had in preventing the loss. A person in this stage may lash out at friends, family, and their faith system. Sometimes the person will feel anger about being abandoned or left alone. There may be attempts to blame others for not preventing the loss.

Depression: The impact of the loss is felt in this stage, as well as the significance of the loss. People may have crying spells, difficulty eating or sleeping, poor concentration, and lack of energy.

Acceptance: In this stage, people come to an understanding of what the loss means to them and begin to heal. They have integrated the loss with their life experiences. They have resolved their feelings about the loss, and they have finished grieving.

Coping with loss

The grieving process is going to be different for each person. What may work for one person who experienced a loss may not work for you. How you cope with a loss is going to depend on what works for you, and not what other people consider to be the “right” way. Listed below are some tips to help you through this difficult time:

- Identify your support system. While you may sometimes feel alone as you are grieving, you are not. There are other people in your life that you can use for support. They may be family, friends, support groups, people in your faith community or mental health professionals.
- Express your feelings. Do not be afraid to tell people how you feel or to express those feelings. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to feel. If it is difficult to verbalize how you feel, use other methods like journaling or drawing to express yourself. It is important to acknowledge your feelings in order to help you better cope with the loss.
- Take care of yourself. When we deal with a stressful situation like a loss, it is easy to forget about taking care of ourselves. It is important that you remember to eat and sleep adequately. It is okay to give yourself a break from grief. Sometimes we need a diversion from the stress to allow us the opportunity to recharge mentally. Keeping ourselves healthy makes it easier to deal with the loss. Avoid drinking alcohol or using drugs as they will inhibit or prevent you from moving forward with your grief.
- Do what works for you. Everybody has their own way of coping. For some people going to wakes and funerals, when the loss is a death, is important to them since it gives them a feeling of closure. For others going to those events is too difficult, and they find other ways for closure such as creating a memorial or engaging in an act to honor the lost person, such as planting flowers or donating to a favorite charity in their name. Whatever will help you deal with the loss in a healthy, productive way is acceptable.
- Plan for the future. When we lose someone close to us, there will come times, like anniversaries, birthdays, holidays and other special events, that will evoke intense feelings and emotions. This is normal and should be expected. Planning ahead on how you will handle those times can make those special days less difficult.

Coping with a loss is difficult as we struggle with our feelings while trying to say “goodbye”. Going through the grieving process is not something that must be done alone. Although the death of a loved one can feel overwhelming, many people make it through the grieving process with the support of family and friends. Take care of yourself, accept offers of help from those around you and be sure to get counseling if you need it.

For further resources, please go to your portal and use the search bar to type in “Coping with Grief Flash Course.”

Additional resources

When a co-worker dies

People who work together are like extended families, and when a person dies, friends and co-workers grieve. When the death is unexpected, it can be particularly traumatic.

The grieving process

Feelings and symptoms of grief can take weeks, months, and even years to manifest and evolve. People do not heal on a timetable, but over time the emotions do ease. The brief time given to attend the funeral only touches the beginning stages of grief. Experts describe the feelings, symptoms and outcomes of grief in various ways.

Broadly speaking, the feelings and symptoms of grief may include: shock, denial, anger, guilt, bargaining, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, exhaustion, overwhelming sadness and concentration difficulties.

Most of the time a person feels several of these emotions at the same time, though perhaps in different degrees. The extent, depth, and duration of the process will also depend on how close people were to the deceased, the circumstances of the death and their own situation. Some outcomes of grief may include finding a new balance (which does not necessarily mean that things will be the same) and growth (readiness to move forward with one's life).

Take time to grieve

You and your team will need time to grieve. Some things to do can include:

- Create a memorial board. A photo, card, or special item the person kept on his/her desk can be a way to remember.
- Hold or participate in a fundraiser for a special cause or for the family of the deceased.
- Create a book of memories to give to the family. Many people are not aware of the work life of people they love. These will be unique memories for the family and a way for you to privately express feelings and memories.
- Conduct a workplace-only event. A luncheon or office-only memorial is a chance for co-workers to acknowledge their unique relationship with the deceased.
- Attend the funeral or memorial service.

People experience grief differently. You or a co-worker who was particularly close to a person who died may feel depressed, absentminded, short-tempered or exhausted. These are all normal feelings. Creating healthy memories is part of healing. Some people find talking about the deceased helps them manage their grief. Others keep to themselves. Respect the fact that others may feel the loss more or less strongly than you, or cope differently. A death also generates questions and fears about our own mortality. If a co-worker dies, you may feel guilty or angry at the person, at life or at the medical profession. It may cause you to question your own life. These are normal emotions.

Be aware of how you react to a deceased co-worker's replacement. Your anger or disappointment at his/her performance, personality or work style may be less a function of the individual than your grief about the person they are replacing.

Seek assistance

Get help from your Employee Assistance Program if you have trouble coping with the loss of your co-worker or if you find that your work is suffering. A decrease in your performance could be a signal that this loss is affecting you more profoundly than you thought.

Moving ahead



What did you get out of today's presentation?

Which concepts are working in your life and why?

Who can be a support for you to make change?

Which concepts are *not* working in your life and why?

What 3 ideas are going to be the most helpful for you?

How can you support someone else with change?

What can you do in the next 24 hours to apply these concepts?

What are your biggest barriers for change?