

Thoughts and Feelings

“I did not expect the range of emotions I felt after the loss of my stepfather. The grief lasted a long time, and I could not get away from it. I had to work through my feelings without a road map or guide.”
—Amy Dunphy, MPH

What Is Grief?

Grief is big, memorable, and life altering.

Grief is the feeling of despair or deep sadness that follows the death of a significant person in your life. It is a normal part of loss. And it can be very difficult and all consuming.

Grief affects people differently. How you feel will depend on many things, such as:

- Your relationship with the person. Were you close? Did you have any regrets about your relationship? Was he or she your main confidant or companion in life?
- How your loved one died. Was it sudden or after a long illness? Were they young or had they lived a long, full life? Was their death a result of an act of violence?
- Your personal beliefs and other experiences about death.
- Other sources of stress in your life.

For most people grief means experiencing a few key components or tasks. According to psychologist William Worden, grief does not take place in any particular order and some tasks may need to be revisited over time. The four tasks of grief or mourning are:

1. To accept the reality of the loss.
2. To experience the pain of grief.
3. To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing.
4. To withdraw (or pull back) emotional energy and reinvest it in other relationships.

Grief is big, memorable, and life altering. You may have some or all of the following feelings:

- Anger
- Sadness and shock
- Confusion and forgetfulness
- Anxiety
- Sensitivity to noises and movement
- Guilt and self-doubt
- Overwhelmed
- Hopelessness

You may also:

- Have trouble sleeping
- Imagine that you see your loved one or hear their voice
- Long to see your loved one

You may have other feelings too.

If you have questions or concerns about your thoughts or feelings, please talk to your local Bereavement Coordinator, counselor, or doctor. Some people have a spiritual leader they are comfortable talking to. For many people, learning about grief from articles, books, or blogs about loss can help. For others, talking with someone is the best approach.

—Amy Dunphy, MPH, Kaiser Permanente

“The grief I felt while my stepfather was still alive was more manageable because I could still hear his voice and be near him, even though he was very ill and his presence was fading. The grief that came after he was gone was much more intense and harder to cope with.”

—Amy Dunphy, MPH

The Physical Side of Grief

When you are grieving, it is important to slow down and pay attention to how you are feeling, not just emotionally but physically. Grieving takes a toll on our bodies that we often underestimate. Your muscles remember your loved one just as your heart and mind does. Some people even say that they feel the loss of their loved one in every cell of their body.

After the death of a loved one, physical symptoms are common. These include:

- Low energy
- Difficulty sleeping or a change in sleep patterns
- Change in appetite
- Weight loss or gain
- Headaches and nausea

- Weakened immunity
- Aches and pains

All of these reactions are normal. However, they can also be signs of illness. Listen to your body and take care of your physical health. Make an appointment to see your doctor for a checkup, or for any other concerns. Your doctor can determine if your symptoms are a normal result of grief, or if you have an



underlying health issue. They can also connect you with additional support.

As you acknowledge the physical side of grief, give yourself permission to nurture yourself. Doing things that you enjoy can restore your energy.

- Take a walk
- Get a massage
- Spend time outdoors in nature
- Rest or nap
- Cook yourself a special meal
- Stay in touch with family and friends

It is important that you take care of your physical health. This will allow you to have energy to continue your journey through grief and to slowly adjust to this new chapter in life.

—Carley Rencher Chen, LCSW,
Kaiser Permanente

“What we once enjoyed deeply
we can never lose. All that we
love deeply becomes part of us.”

—Helen Keller



This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor.

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