

Coping with grief

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Grief and loss caused by the death of a loved one, illness or another devastating situation can have a huge impact on your mental and physical well-being and even redefine your entire identity. Your personal experience with grief is unique and so is how you choose to cope. Some of the suggestions in this article will work better than others for you, so do what feels right for you and your family. While it may sound cliché, time is really the best remedy for overcoming grief and healing the wounds it creates. While it will definitely take time, energy and personal struggle, coming to terms with your emotions is possible.

- **Take the time.** After a significant loss, many people set unrealistic expectations of when they should return to "normal." Everyone grieves at his or her own pace. Emotions don't follow a schedule, so don't try to force them to. Respect the need for personal healing time; realize that this is not a step-by-step process and that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Take things one day at a time and slowly transition back into your daily routine.
- **Find support.** At first, you may find it easier to retreat and hide than to lean on others. Instead, reach out to friends and family. Ask for help organizing the details of a funeral or recruit a friend to babysit so you have time to collect your thoughts. Friends and family are usually eager to help but struggle with what to do and when, so don't be shy to ask. Also consider joining a support group to connect with other people who have dealt with similar situations.
- **Seek help.** If your grief has become overwhelming consider connecting with a counsellor or other mental health professional. Signs that it's time for professional support include: prolonged eating or sleeping problems, trouble completing daily activities, severe anxiety, depression or feelings of worthlessness. While it can seem daunting to reach out to a "stranger," an outside, impartial person can provide the sounding board and insights you need to move beyond the pain and get on with your life.
- **Indulge yourself.** Be sure to take some time to focus on yourself and try to meet your own needs. During a crisis it can feel wrong to indulge, but it can actually be a helpful tool that can help you relax and release all that pent up tension. Take some time out for yourself by getting a massage, visiting the spa or even taking a relaxing hot bath.

- **Lean on friends.** Make time to spend with close friends who can be that ear you need to vent your grief, fear and anxiety caused by your distressing news. Your shared experiences with good friends can also have a way of making you smile or laugh, even on the darkest of days.
- **Write it down.** After a loss it can be difficult to pinpoint exactly what you're feeling. You may experience several feelings at the same time and others that contradict each other. Writing down your thoughts may help you express yourself and come to terms with what you are going through. Try to write exactly what's on your mind without editing or screening yourself.
- **Prioritize self-care.** Eat healthy meals, exercise (even if it's going for a short walk every day), and get a full night's sleep. Grief is an emotional process that takes a toll on the body, and so supporting the body becomes paramount.
- **Seek and accept support.** You can't do this alone. Whether it's accepting a home-cooked meal from a dear friend, joining a grief support group, or seeing a counsellor, you will need other people to support you at times.
- **Accept happiness.** Above all, when you do experience happiness and laughter, allow them to exist, and even be grateful for them!

Wherever you are at in the process, whatever you are feeling, the only thing you can be certain of is that it will change again.

For more information and help, please contact Morneau-Shepell (EFAP):

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