



Big Bend Hospice Bereavement Services **Common Reactions to Loss**

Each person's grief is unique.

Grief is affected by many factors including the relationship with the person that died, the cause of death, and the quality of support surrounding the bereaved. Additionally, a person's grief reaction can be affected by other losses or stresses and the person's overall ability to cope with stressful life situations.

Grief often comes in waves, with many ups and downs that can be unpredictable and unsettling. One thing we know is that the healing process takes much longer than society in general expects. Below are some common grief reactions. Remember that each person will react in unique ways and may include feelings and thoughts that are not listed here. Finding safe outlets for pain/grief, asking for help, and being patient can help those who are grieving.

FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

- Sadness, sorrow, anguish
- Anxiety, panic, fear, insecurity
- Yearning, longing
- Helplessness, overwhelmed, out of control
- Anger, guilt, hostility, irritability, impatience
- Guilt, self-reproach, regret
- Inadequacy
- Depressed, sense of despair, joyless, self-pity, frustration
- Loneliness, emptiness, abandoned
- Hypersensitive, mood swings
- Relief, peace, acceptance, hope

THOUGHTS AND IDEAS

- Shock and disbelief
- Bewilderment, confusion, disorganized
- Impaired concentration, memory, mental functioning, and decision making
- Sense of meaningless or senselessness
- Many questions: Why me? Why them? What now? Will I/we be able to cope?
- Decreased interest or motivation
- Preoccupation with the deceased, events leading to the death; obsession with thoughts about the person that died
- Feeling of going crazy
- Intermittent, generalized thoughts of suicide

Call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, or chat online at [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org)



Common Reactions to Loss



SOCIAL

- Lack of interest in usual activities
- Decrease or increase in desire to be around others
- Withdrawal
- Dependence on others, desire to avoid being alone
- Jealous or resentful of others who have not had a loss
- Sense of detachment, alienation from others

PHYSICAL AND BEHAVIORAL

- Searching (*for deceased*), restless activity, agitation, heightened arousal, easily startled
- Crying, tearfulness
- Disturbances in appetite and sleep
- Muscle aches, headaches
- Tension or nervousness
- Feeling heavy or exhausted
- Feeling a “lump” or tightness in throat
- Hair loss
- Easily susceptible to colds, flu, and physical ailments
- Tendency to sigh
- Decreased productivity and effectiveness (*home, work, school*)
- May avoid or seek out people, situations, and things that are reminders of the deceased
- Acting out, impulsive behaviors
- Changes in level of interest in sexual desires/sex
- Lifestyle changes

SPIRITUAL

- Questioning beliefs about God, religion, death, and afterlife
- A sense of being abandoned by God or higher power
- Anger with/at God
- Inability to pray
- A sense of closeness to God or higher power
- Sense of your loved one’s presence; connectedness
- Questions about your own life and its meaning
- Consolation in scripture/questioning of scripture
- Acceptance

If you need more information, feel free to contact us:

(850) 878-5310 | bereavement@bigbendhospice.org

or visit us online at www.bigbendhospice.org



Big Bend Hospice

Inspiring Hope, One Family at a Time

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Tips & Suggestions

for Coping with Grief

- **Emotions are not right or wrong:** It is o.k. to express them with someone you trust.
- Those nagging doubts: Many griever's struggle with thoughts/feelings that they could have done something differently or better. **Self-condemnation and blame only adds to stress.** Forgiveness can be an important part of healing from a loss.
- Take extra care of yourself: **Rest when you need it** since you may require more than usual.
- **Avoid using drugs or alcohol.** It is a natural temptation to use these means to numb out the pain of loss. Drugs or alcohol can interfere with the natural progression of grief and only postpones the reality of our loss and our ability to accept it.
- Tell the story of your loved one: **Some people need to tell and re-tell the story many times** as a way to make sense of and find meaning in what happened.
- **Postpone major life decisions:** Experts suggest waiting at least 1-2 years if possible before moving, selling property, re-marrying, divorcing.
- Talk to other family members: **It is important to keep the lines of communication open**, especially for the benefit of children and teens.
- **Be proactive:** It is normal to wallow and slip into self-pity, but try not to stay there too long. You do have some control over how you cope with grief.
- Make your own decisions. Well-meaning friends and family members may tell you what is best for you. **Although it is helpful to postpone making major decisions after a loss, it is important to do what is best for you.** When people make suggestions, consider them, and then decide for yourself.
- **Stay connected with people you trust.** They can be one of your best sources of support. Even if your heart is not always 100% in it, find time to accept their invitations.
- Health matters. **Your body is under a lot of stress while grieving, so take care of it.** Take vitamins, rest, exercise, and seek the care of your physician as needed.
- Educate yourself. Learning about the normal, natural, and necessary process of grief and how to cope can be helpful in navigating the challenging experience of loss. There are many good resources at local libraries, on-line, and through area bookstores.
- **Find safe ways to ventilate your anger and feelings:**
 - Do something creative
 - Exercise
 - Write a letter & tear it up
 - Build something
 - Practice relaxation or stress management techniques
- Allow yourself to grieve in your own way: Take one day at a time and appreciate that healing is a process. Although others are often well-intentioned, they may not know what to say or do to help you. Your tears, anger, fears, and doubts are normal.

**If you ever feel overwhelmed or endangered,
it is often a sign of strength to reach out for help.**

