

Dealing With Emotions: Coping With Grief Including Worksheets

(Based on the original blog post on 10/12/2018)

What is grief?

Grief is our natural response to losing someone or something, the death of a family member or friend, a relationship ends, loss of your job. Other life changes may bring about grief such as [chronic illness](#), disability (you or loved one), even moving home or country.

For the first six months, at least, you'll feel like it's an emotional rollercoaster of denial, sadness, crying, loneliness. The first year brings with it all the missed anniversaries, Christmas, birthdays, all the usual family celebrations etc.

Even after a period of time, we can go through a short grieving period when we realize a loved one has missed a very special family occasion such as a baptism, birth of a child, wedding etc, so don't be surprised that you find yourself reliving those same stages of grief again in the run-up to or on the day. This is perfectly normal reaction to have.

The most important thing to take from this blog is that everyone grieves differently. But if you understand the process that grief takes, give yourself time to grieve, understand your emotions, start to take care of yourself, and seek support, you can heal and life will get better again.

Remember that "normal grief" can vary greatly between cultures, people, and situations. Grief is a natural process, and does not always require treatment. But about 10% of people develop complicated grief after a loss (see below). When we have complicated grief it can be treated with therapy. So it is important to reach out if you feel you are "stuck" in the grief process, but don't make any decisions regarding this in the first six months.

The Grief Process.

Acute Grief: This occurs immediately after a loss, and lasts for months afterwards. It is not usual to feel like you are on a rollercoaster of emotions for the first six months. That is why a therapist will ask you to wait until this period is over before coming in for grief therapy if you require it. It's normal to have intense symptoms of shock, distress, sadness, poor appetite, sleep trouble, and poor concentration, etc. The symptoms will slowly diminish with the passage of time and give way to integrated grief usually. Sometimes thought people may enter into complicated grief (see below) this requires help from a therapist.

Integrated Grief: After resolving the most intense symptoms of acute (or complicated grief if you have this), you will enter the lifelong stage of integrated grief. At this point, you accept the reality of the loss, and have resumed your daily life activities. It doesn't mean that you don't miss your loved one. Nor does it mean that you don't feel pain at their memory. But you have learned how to cope. Acute grief may show itself again, especially around holidays, anniversaries, and other reminders as I've said above.

Complicated Grief: Sometimes people may enter into complicated grief after acute grief. They experience symptoms of acute grief which never seem to go away. These symptoms can last for years. The loss they have experienced may continue to feel unreal and unmanageable. They may constantly yearn for the deceased, or feel guilty about “moving on” and accepting their loss.

What Are the Stages of Grief?

First off, let me say you can't control this process, it is helpful to understand this process and the reasons behind why you are feeling as you are in each stage. These stages allow you to come to terms with your loss in a slowly evolving manner, it can't be rushed and never should be. Never let anyone else dictate where you are in this process or where they think you should be. As I've said it takes time and everyone is different. In saying that, people can get stuck and need help at times, if you find yourself in need of help please reach out to a qualified counsellor. Psychologists have identified and outlined five common stages of grief:

- **Denial**

When you first learn of a loss it is normal to feel shocked or numb as you are overwhelmed by what has happened. It is a normal defence mechanism to enable you to cope at that time. But it is temporary. Even if a loved one is old or very sick prior to death you will still enter the denial stage.

- **Anger**

When the reality of what has happened hits, we are faced with the pain of what has happened. We may feel frustrated and helpless and then angry. It's common to direct that anger at other people, our higher power, life in general or even at our dead loved one, as they have left you to cope alone.

- **Bargaining**

The next stage we enter is bargaining, we dwell on the what if's or if only's. We can try and bargain with our higher power or others too.

- **Depression**

So after bargaining, we enter a [depression](#), the sadness of our loss sets in and we see how our lives have been affected by that loss. We can feel very hard done by at this stage. Depression can keep some people trapped at this stage, so please be aware of the signs and if you are depressed for a long period of time contact your GP or counsellor for help. You may not even realise you have gotten stuck here but friends and family may recognise the symptoms and help you. [Signs of depression](#) include crying, sleep issues, and a decreased appetite, plus you may feel overwhelmed, regretful, and lonely.

- **Acceptance**

You've entered this final stage of grief, you accept the reality of your loss and the fact it can't be changed. It doesn't mean you're not sad at this loss but you are able to start moving on with your life again.

As I've said every person goes through these phases in their own way. You can go back and forth between stages, or skip one or more stages altogether. Again be aware that reminders of your loss, such as family events, the anniversary of a death or a familiar song, can trigger the return of grief.

How Long Is Too Long to Mourn?

There's no such thing as a "normal" amount of time to grieve. How long you grieve for will depend on many factors, including what or who you are grieving for. Other factors will include your personality, age, beliefs, how close you were with the person, does the loss affect your sense of identity and your support network. Remember with time the sadness will ease and you will find happiness and joy again, life will return to a new normal for you.

How to cope with grief?

1. **Understand the stages of grief and accept that grieving is normal.** You will go through these stages, you will cry, get angry and have emotional outbursts, sometimes at the wrong moment. These emotions will settle down particularly after the first six months to one year.
2. **Give yourself time to grieve.** Again each person is different here, make sure you don't let others dictate how or when you can grieve. Take all the time you need and make sure you're taking care of yourself.
3. **Surround yourself with good family and friends.** Spending all your time alone isn't good, it will only make you feel worse. But spending time with [negative people](#) won't be good either. So make sure to surround yourself with loving, kind, support family or friends only. Keep in regular contact, do try and make the effort to go out even for a cup of tea or coffee at the start. Let people nurture you, buy you lunch or make dinner for you. We all need 4 types of support even in the best of times, read my blog here on [building a support system](#).
4. **As they say get busy, get better.** Although it may be hard some days it's better to have [a good routine](#) while you are grieving. Be kind and patient with yourself too, as you may make mistakes you wouldn't normally make, that's normal. Sometimes we need a very [structured routine](#) to help us get through the day, it may feel too structured to others but it may be what we need and that's okay too.
5. **It's okay to make time for things you enjoy.** It's important to do things you enjoy to boost your spirits, you may feel guilty, a loved one is missing out or you shouldn't do these things, after all, you're grieving and others may judge you. Or you may become fearful to try these things again as something bad

might happen if you do. Let these thoughts go, it's okay and normal to enjoy life even while you are grieving.

6. **Connect with your faith.** Whatever your religious belief, it can bring comfort to connect with it and your faith will help you mourn. It's normal for people to turn away from their religion during grief but they later return and find comfort in it.
7. **Get help if needed.** From a therapist, support group, family, friends, books or articles can all be very helpful. Remember you are never alone, so reach out if you need to. If you feel you are stuck or have developed severe mood swings, emotional or physical problems please seek the help of your GP and a grief counsellor immediately.
8. **Despite the loss live your life to its fullest.** Yes, you will probably not be able to do this until you have reached the acceptance stage, but when you do, remember, your loved one would have wanted you to be happy. If you are grieving for other reasons, other than death, then living your life can often be the best way to show others that, although they wrote you off, you won't write yourself off too.
9. **Examine your personal beliefs.** If you believe that you will find happiness again after a loss then you will. What you believe will make you more, or less, likely to seek out happiness and joy in life again. So choose wisely. Taking time now with a therapist to examine what it is you believe in, or how positive or negative your thoughts are can be both enlightening and rewarding.

Advice on how on to help children deal with grief [click here](#).

The Worksheets are below but you might also like the following:

[Understanding Anger including worksheets](#)

[Self-forgiveness including worksheets](#)

Recognizing Your Experience With Grief

1. What are some life events that have caused you to grieve?

2. What's the thing that surprised you most about your grief?

3. Have you ever grieved for someone else's pain? How did you deal with it?

Recognising The Stages Of Grief

1. Did you recognize the five stages of grieving in yourself?

2. Which stage of grief do you feel like you're going through right now?

3. In what ways, have you tried bargaining during your grief?

Recognising We Need Self-Care & Routine During Grief

1. How has grief changed your self-care routines? Routines can give you a feeling of control and safety. But when you've grieving your normal routines may not be possible anymore. That's where creating new routines can be helpful. It's important to understand that there's no quick fix or escape from grief.

2. What basic self-care activity appeals to you the most?

- [Sleep](#) 8 hours every night or try to.
- Eat regular meals daily, 3 or 5/6 smaller ones.
- Drink water daily – cut back on caffeine.
- Exercise 30 minutes; 5 days a week: Break it up into either 10-minute intervals or combine it with a hobby/interest.
- Shower regularly.
- Dress the best you can, every day. Something that helps you feel good. Not what others say you should be wearing.
- Wash your clothes every week.
- Tidy your home and do the laundry.
- Pray or meditate daily.
- Journal: include some things you're grateful for – daily.
- Take time for your own interests and hobbies – it's ok to do this.
- Meet up with friends and family – [only if they are supporting you](#). No negative vampires need apply.
- Parents, take time out to be a couple every week, it doesn't mean it has to cost anything
- Ask for help – speak to a professional if necessary, your doctor could be your first port of call. (see below)
- Have regular check-ups: Doctor and dentist appointments.
- Attend therapy, recovery groups: if needed weekly
- Use appropriate self-soothing techniques instead of using alcohol, drugs, food etc. Self-soothing techniques are good habits, so use these to replace bad ones, or introduce them before trying to quit bad habits. You can find a list of these [starting here](#).
- Others you might want to do:

Want a Basic Self-care Reminder Checklist? Check out our [free resources](#) it comes in 10 colours for your planner or put it up on the fridge to remind the family too.

Pick one or two to get started. Could you do it right now?

Recognising We Need Help

Read back through the introduction and the stages of grief again. Then read again your responses in the first worksheet on recognising the stages of grief. Now complete the following worksheet.

1. What stage of grief do you think you are experiencing now?

2. Do you feel “stuck” in one particular stage? If so what stage is that?

If it has been longer than one year, do you feel you are now ready to accept what has happened?

3. Can you recognise you might need extra help/support? If so are you willing to reach out to your doctor or a grief therapist today?

Don't wait make that call!

Recognising We Need A Support System

We don't need to go through grief alone.

Read the worksheet [Building A Support System Information & Worksheet](#).

Now answer the following questions.

What support systems do you have in place already?

What and who do you need to add in?

What's one way you could let someone else care for you this week?

Who has supported you while you were grieving?

What did you find particularly comforting that they did or said?

Recognising Your Feelings, Thoughts & Triggers.

You can also read [Thought Trap Patterns & Automatic Thoughts Challenger](#)

1. How are you feeling/thinking? What activities help you release those feelings? When we journal out our feelings/thoughts we can begin to see if there is a pattern that might need addressing or help from a therapist. Even just writing out how we feel and what we thinking may help us to process our emotions and behaviours more fully. So keeping a daily diary may help you with this process.

2. What triggers send you back to traumatic moments? How do you cope with these triggers? Some things may create a moment which feels like you are back in the moment of loss. These can include: sounds, smells, places or events that remind you of what you've lost. These triggers can cause you to freeze, tense up, cry or panic. When you know what your triggers are, you can learn how to cope with them. A trained counsellor can help you identify these and give you strategies to cope.

Trigger	Your Response

Notes