

GRIEVING

Grief begins with a loss. Although death is the most obvious trigger, divorce or marital separation, relocation, news of a fatal illness, loss of physical or mental ability due to accident or disease, and even unemployment are all common sources of grief.

Grief affects us both **emotionally and physically**. It is expressed *emotionally* through:

+ **Denial**- In the early days after a loss, you may find it hard to believe that the person or thing is *really* gone.

+ **Anger** -You may be mad at the person or thing you lost for abandoning you and "letting you down".

+ **Guilt** -Some people experience *rational regrets* such as I should have spent more time with him/her while others struggle with *irrational thoughts* such as believing that the person died because you left on a business trip.

+ **Despair** -A deep depression may set in once you truly acknowledge the loss. You may feel intensely sad, *cry* often, and sleep either too little or too much.

Other emotional reactions to loss include **apathy** (emotional numbness), **mental confusion**, **inability to make decisions**, **forgetfulness**, and **fearfulness**. Panic disorders are also not uncommon during a grief reaction.

Physical reactions to grief include *sleep disturbances, appetite changes, lack of energy, and difficulty breathing*. Grief also appears to weaken the immune and *cardiovascular systems*, increasing vulnerability to infections and providing a possible medical basis for the phrase "died of a broken heart".

Many researchers divide these reactions into stages, but **grieving is a very individual process**. Some people may not exhibit distress openly and it is important for families, friends and helping professionals not to misinterpret this as an absence of grief. No two people grieve in exactly the same way and **there is no "right" way to grieve**.

Counseling can help when grief seems overwhelming. In therapy you learn to *acknowledge* your loss, experience the grief and *confront* the pain: to *adjust* to a way of life without the lost person or object: and to *re-enter* life to become involved with others again. Therapy can also help reduce feelings of *helplessness* and *powerlessness* by guiding you in the decision-making process about how to express your grief, what to do with belongings of the deceased, and how to handle significant dates and places.

Unresolved grief has serious physical and mental implications. Repressed anger, depression and loneliness may go "underground" temporarily, but will resurface later with greater intensity if not fully experienced and resolved.

