

# Grief and Healing



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# Rage Makes Me Strong

In a July 1996 Time magazine article titled Rage Makes Me Strong, Susan Cohen, who lost her daughter in the terrorist bombing of Pam Am Flight 103, said:

Loss changes our lives. We may feel drawn deep into a vortex--disoriented, unable to find our way, and believing that things will never be "normal" again.

“The very phrase ‘grief process’ tells it all. Bland, neutral words that have nothing to do with the personal hell we experience when we lose someone we love.”

The difference between bland, neutral words and healing begins with understanding that grief is not just an emotion. We experience grief physically and mentally after we experience a painful loss or a traumatic event. We can experience grief down to our soul--we can naturally question our spiritual beliefs. Each of us experiences grief differently—even though we may experience the same loss.

As we begin to heal, we begin to define a new normal. We begin to rise from the vortex. We find our way. And, we realize that grieving grief is indeed a process we experience as we heal.



# Types of Grief

## Normal Grief

Various life events can cause grief to varying degrees:

- Ending a relationship
- Losing a job
- Illness or disease (impacting you or someone you care about)
- Assault
- Accident
- A painful or traumatic event

Grieving people may experience crying, sleep changes, appetite changes, disengagement from life tasks, friends, relationships, family, and work; they may exhibit anger and they may feel guilty, lonely, depressed, empty and sad. They may feel numb or helpless and believe that things will never feel any different, or any better. They may experience moments of happiness or joy in the midst of grief. These experiences are a normal response to grief in the days and weeks following a loss.

## Complicated Grief

According to the National Institutes of Health, about 7% of bereaved people experience Complicated Grief, a chronic impairing form of grief that interferes with the healing process. Risk factors for Complicated Grief include:

- A death that is sudden, unexpected, traumatic, violent, or random
- Death from an overly long illness, such as Alzheimer's Disease or cancer
- The loss of a child
- The mourner's belief that the death could have been prevented
- A relationship with the dead person that was angry, ambivalent, or overly dependent
- The mourner having an illness that coincides with the death
- The mourner's experience of multiple losses within a short time
- Lack of social support for the mourner

People feeling trapped in grief or who are experiencing intensified grief despite the passage of several months can recover more quickly with support from a professional grief therapist or mental health professional. It's good to ask, "If you had a broken foot, would you want to suffer until the broken bone healed, or would you want to see a doctor and help the bone heal properly and more quickly?"

### **Delayed Grief**

Sometimes, we postpone a normal grief response until later. We do this because we need to "be strong" in order to help someone else or we are already experiencing too much stress to allow the healing process to begin, or we need more time to accept the reality of the loss, or we can't begin grieving until experiencing an event that evokes another strong emotional response.

### **Disenfranchised Grief**

A person may experience disenfranchised grief when he or she cannot openly acknowledge the loss, the loss is not socially accepted, or when the loss cannot be publicly mourned. Causes may include a death related to HIV/AIDS, miscarriage or stillbirth, the death of a same-sex partner or spouse, the death of the partner in an extra-marital affair, or grieving someone you can't remember (ex. a parent or sibling who died when you were an infant or before you were born).

Victims of family violence may experience grief that is unrecognized, unsupported, and unacknowledged (by the victim and by others who are close to the victim).

The aftermath may include addiction, physical health issues, disability, mental illness, continuing victimization, financial instability, PTSD, challenges maintaining a job, custody issues, and rejection by older children who identify with the parent who has the "power" in the relationship.

## Traumatic Grief

A person may experience traumatic grief when a death is violent, unexpected, or causes a person to die “before his or her time,” such as an infant, child, murder victim, or accident victim. Traumatic grief can include exposure to war trauma among military members, their families, and their children.

If the loss was unexpected or sudden, and particularly if the loved one died by suicide, the pain can, at times, feel unbearable.

## Helping a Person Through Grief

Helping a person who is grieving can be gut wrenching. It’s good to ask ourselves if we are in the right place to help someone else or if we need to connect that person to others who can help.

For the first days, weeks or months following a sudden loss, friends and family may find it helpful to take turns staying with the grieving person. It is not necessary (or even possible) to stop the grief. What may be of most help is to:

- Just be there
- Listen quietly and non-judgmentally
- Allow the person to say what they need to say or to say nothing, to cry when they need to cry, and to fully express all the painful and complicated emotions they are experiencing
- Don’t say that they shouldn't feel this way or that they shouldn't cry anymore
- Don't argue if the person feels responsible for the loss—over time, gradually and gently try to help the person see things from a different perspective
- Listen--some more
- If the grieving person talks about wanting to end his or her own life, acknowledge the pain that the person is in. If the person is displaying suicide warning signs, follow through with calling 1-800-273-8255, BestCare at 541-475-6575, or 911 if you feel it is an emergency.

The process of grieving, though gut wrenching is also a process of healing. If a person who has experienced loss does not seem to be able to grieve fully, but seems to hide all the feelings inside, it is time to get help from a professional counselor. You can gently confront the person and caringly introduce the subject of counseling.

### **Children and Grief**

Growing up is an ongoing process of change that can involve loss. Starting childcare, school, sleeping over at a friend's house, changing classes and teachers, or losing a pet, a friend or a family member, all bring new challenges and new learning. Depending on the support children receive and how these early losses are dealt with, children can learn to manage and cope with the losses that will happen throughout their lives.

Children grieve, and grief can happen at an early age, but not in the same way as adults. Children are likely to show their grief in less direct ways than adults. Children move in and out of grief. One day they will seem to be fine and another day they will not manage so well.

Children often have more needs during times of loss, which can lead to demanding behavior as they try to get closeness, care, information, reassurance and support from adults. The experience of loss affects each child differently. The child's age, emotional maturity, the circumstances of the loss, and the 'connectedness' with the person or whatever the child has lost are important factors. It is important to look at each child individually and work out what will best help that child.

## When Children Grieve

Some of the losses experienced by children are the same as those for adults:

- When a parent dies or goes away.
- When parents separate or a family breaks-up.
- Loss of a friend or friendship.
- Loss of a pet.
- Having a disability.
- Loss of memories due to fire or flood.
- Loss of culture and homeland when moving to a new country.
- Death of a grandparent.
- Moving house or changing schools.
- Long periods of separation from a parent.
- Being the in hospital.
- Crying and giggling without obvious reason.
- Not wanting to separate, being clingy, wanting to be near adults.
- Running away, avoiding school, stealing.

Children may grieve for something that seems small to adults but is big for children, e.g. losing their favorite stuffed animal.

## How Children Show Their Grief

Young children usually don't have the words to talk about their feelings in the way that adults do. They may not even really know what they feel. Some of the ways they show grief may be:

- Physical pain such as stomachaches or headaches.
- Sleeping problems, bad dreams.
- Eating problems, eating too much or too little.
- Being destructive; temper tantrums.
- Acting like a younger child.
- Angry play or playing the same thing over and over.
- Being unhappy and blaming themselves.
- Tendency to think the person who has gone is perfect.
- Being easily upset.
- "Switching off," acting as if they haven't taken in what has happened.
- Acting more like an adult.

## Reminders

- Children grieve in bursts - they don't show their grief in the same way as adults.
- Keep to family routines as much as you can to provide a sense of “normal” and security.
- Let the school or childcare worker know what has happened.
- Don't rely on your child for support. You need to support your child.

- Be honest, trustworthy and reliable. Give your grieving child special times with you to talk about feelings.
- The biggest need for children and teenagers who have experienced loss is that they are supported and cared for and have someone to talk to about it.
- If your child or teenager seems to not be managing, seek help.

## Children's Understanding of Loss

### Preschool Children

- In the years before school, children generally don't understand that death is permanent.
- They feel grief when they lose someone close to them.
- The impact of the loss may be greater in the early years because they don't really understand what is happening.
- They don't understand what is real and what is not real, and they may believe that their own wishes caused the person they loved to go away.
- Losing someone who cares for them is a major stress that takes time and care to overcome. In a way, it is like losing a part of themselves.
- Young children don't have the words to express feelings and will show their feelings in the way they act. They may be more clingy and needy or develop problems separating from you.
- Children can be very kind to others who are unhappy and try to comfort them and then they need to go on playing again.

## Early Years of School

- Children are beginning to learn that death is permanent.
- They begin to realize that when someone dies there is no coming back, but they may ask what has happened many times over so that they can understand.
- Some children feel responsible for the death or separation and think it was because they were naughty.
- They may also be worried about who will look after them--if they have lost a parent, they may worry about losing the other parent as well.
- They may be very matter-of-fact in the way they talk about death and want lots of information, such as what happens to the body.
- They may not know what it is they are feeling or know the words to say how they feel but you will see it in their behavior and play.
- Times of Family Loss Are Times of Particular Stress on Children
- The adults who love them may not be available to support the children if the adults are very upset themselves.
- There are strange situations to cope with e.g. funerals or moving
- People around them act differently, looking sad, crying, not keeping to routines, or acting like everything is fine when it isn't.
- Children might be asked to be different, e.g. to be quiet, to be helpful, to be good.
- They are not sure what to think or do.
- When a parent dies, children need to feel (with caring acts and words) that they will not be abandoned.

## Teen Grief

The prefrontal cortex of the brain is the decision-making part of the brain, and in teens, the prefrontal cortex isn't fully developed until the mid-twenties. Because the prefrontal cortex is still developing, the amygdala in the teen brain is used to make decisions and solve problems. The amygdala controls emotions, impulses, aggression and instincts. Grieving for a teen can be a whirlwind of emotions. While grief is normal and can be processed in a healthy way, teens may not want to experience the whirlwind.

Like adults, teens grieve in different ways; one teen may want total isolation for a while; another may stuff the feelings and become the family comedian.

Keep an eye out for warning signs of alcohol or drug use, rage, antisocial behaviors, changes in sleep patterns and suicide warning signs.

For teens, relationships with friends become as valuable as relationships with family, and unique in that teens establish their own identities based upon their relationships with friends. The death or loss of a boyfriend or girlfriend may have a stronger impact on them than a grandparent.

Like adults, teens may experience complicated grief. For example, the loss of an addicted or abusive parent.

“My daughter, a planner and an “A” student, broke up with her long-term boyfriend. Within a month, she had plans to move to Germany...with a guy she didn't really even know.”

## Ways to Help a Grieving Teen

- Like adults, the best way to help a grieving teen is to provide meaningful assurance, validation, non-judgment, and lots of listening
- Allow for open dialogue about religion and philosophy. Nurture them in finding their own answers; if appropriate, be open to admitting that you're still trying to answer some questions, too, or connect them to trusted faith leaders.
- If your family is involved in memorial planning, discuss what to expect depending on the type of services. If possible, include them in the planning. Allow them to participate—or not.
- As teens adjust to loss, they may explore a new role in life. Be mindful of whether their role is a teen role or that of an adult. Responsibility is healthy as long as it's appropriate for the age and stage of the teen.
- Be patient and open-minded
- Encourage additional social support systems (family, friends and/or community) and activities such as sports, music, athletics, writing, reading
- If the loss affected you, it's okay if you are not ready to talk about the loss or listen. Ask the teen who they can talk honestly to about the loss
- Validate their feelings, even if you don't agree
- Check in with other adults involved in their life – other parents, teachers, school counselors, coaches
- Be prepared for full recurring emotions in response to milestones and rituals such as birthdays, graduations, weddings, and the birth of children.
- Notice what's going on in your teen's life—even as you deal with your own grief. Remember that it's okay to ask for help, from a trusted friend, a crisis hotline, or a professional.

## What Parents and Adults Can Do

Don't hide your own sadness. Children will feel more normal about their own feelings and feel comforted to know that the feelings they have are in line with those of the rest of the family. It is also important for children to know that you are in control and can keep them safe.

- Provide a safe environment where children are able to express feelings through play, water play, writing a letter, a story, a poem, painting or drawing.
- Give clear and truthful information to children in a way that they can understand. Children need to know what is happening even if they don't ask. Children may not seem sad when you think they should be because they still don't really understand what happened.
- Allow children time to talk, ask questions, and share worries with a caring adult. They might be very confused and need to ask lots of questions over and over again. If you can't talk about it because of your own emotions, find another trusted adult who is close to your child who can. If children can't talk to you about the loss, they might feel that it is not safe to talk about it at all, and they may continue to have muddled and scary feelings.
- If your child feels unable to talk about his feelings. Say something like "Some things are really hard to talk about, but talking can help. If you ever want to talk about what has happened, let me know."
- Stick to as many normal routines as you can. Too many changes will add further stress.

- Think about letting your child's teacher or childcare worker know if there has been a big change or loss in your child's life so that schools can be supportive.
- Keep some rules about what children are allowed to do.
- Get support for yourself. Talk with your partner, a friend, a grief counselor, an online support group, or listen to a podcast, which may fit your situation.
- Ceremonies such as funerals can be important ways for children to help make sense of the big changes in their lives. Sharing emotions can help people feel connected to others.
- Remember that children grieve in bursts. They have their own individual reactions, and they feel loss just as much as adults; they may just show it differently.
- Allow many opportunities for extra closeness and comfort; snuggle while watching a comforting TV show, work on a craft together, grab a camera and go take pictures of nature together. If your teen has had a loss and is acting angrily or withdrawing, try to make times to be available to talk, without pushing for answers, or simply sit and be quiet. Review the warning signs of suicide and get professional help if you are wondering if your child is at risk.

Be honest. It may be tempting to lie to children because we want to protect them.

By using age appropriate language to tell them what has happened, we can help children avoid long-lasting trust issues, promote healing, and we can teach them how to grieve in a healthy way.

## Introducing the Subject of Counseling

If you are worried about a friend, your child, or another family member and have made the decision to get help, you may want to begin by pointing out what concerns you. For example, "I'm sorry that you've experienced such a tremendous loss. I know that I would feel lost if that happened to me. I'm worried about you because..."

Sometimes defining what counseling is can help ease the person's anxiety about counseling. It's okay to tell the person "You don't need to get your head shrunk, and you don't have to talk about family history for the past 100 years unless you want to."

You might say something like "If I were to give you an airplane and tell you to fly, you wouldn't just jump in, start pushing buttons, and expect it to fly; right? First, you would take flying lessons so that you knew how to handle the plane.

Sometimes, we need help learning how to cope when life feels like an airplane spinning out of control. Just like learning to fly a plane, a counselor can help us learn to deal with things in life that make us feel like everything is spinning out of control. Let's talk about making an appointment for you to see a counselor, and together, your counselor and I will help you."



## **Suicide Warning Signs**

### **Cause for Immediate Action**

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to die
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide
- Verbal—Direct Statements of Suicidal Intent—
- “I’m going to end it all.”
- “I wish I were dead.”
- “I’ve decided to kill myself.”
- “I’m going to be with ( the person who has died) soon.”
- Less Direct Statements of Suicidal Intent—
- “Everyone would be better off without me.”
- “Pretty soon you won’t have to worry about me.”
- “Who cares if I am dead anyway?”
- “It isn’t worth it anymore.”
- "I just...can't."

### **Immediate Action**

- Call 911 or take the person to the Emergency Room
- Do not leave the person alone, not even for a minute—not even to go to the bathroom.
- Inform dispatch of any threats toward emergency responders.
- You may also inform dispatch if the person is experiencing a mental illness, is a child or youth, and if it would be best to not respond with sirens and lights. *Note: It is still up to the response team to decide how to respond*

### **Cause for Concern**

- Feeling hopeless; trapped, like there’s no way out
- Feeling rage or uncontrollable anger, seeking revenge; dramatic mood changes
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Feeling anxious or agitated; changes in sleeping patterns
- Sudden improvement in mood after being down or withdrawn
- Giving away favorite possessions; making final arrangements

# Resources

## Bereavement Groups

### **Redmond Area Bereavement Group**

Facilitator Herb Baker: 503.708.3047 or [herbandjudy@yahoo.com](mailto:herbandjudy@yahoo.com)

### **Compassionate Friends**

Contact Carol Palmer: 541-408-0667 or [carolpalmerrn@icloud.com](mailto:carolpalmerrn@icloud.com)

### **Partners in Care – To Register: 541.382.5882**

Grief Programs and Support Groups

## Online Resources

### **Survivors of Suicide** - <http://www.survivorsofsuicide.com/>

To help those who have lost a loved one to suicide resolve their grief and pain in their own personal way. This site will offer information that will help answer some of those questions, as well as provide a safe place for survivors and friends of survivors to share their struggle and pain and offer comfort and understanding to others who have experienced a similar loss.

### **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** -

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/loss-survivors/>  
Provides a comprehensive list of resources for suicide loss survivors.

### **The Dougy Center** - <https://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/>

The Dougy Center provides support groups and resources, including videos on healing for people experiencing grief.

### **Recover From Grief** - <https://www.recover-from-grief.com/>

This website contains a variety of creative mourning techniques, including talking, writing, creating art, music or poetry.

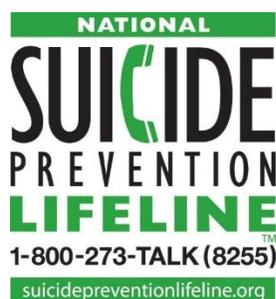
## Focus on Your Own Safety

It is not uncommon for Survivors of suicide loss to experience their own thoughts of suicide. Most Survivors do not die by suicide. If you or someone you know is experiencing crisis or thoughts of suicide, it's a good idea to talk with someone you can trust and to reduce access to:

**Firearms** – Identify a trusted person to store the firearms off site just as a temporary step until things get better. Madras Police Department (541.475.2344) and the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (541.475.6520) will safely store unloaded firearms temporarily. It's okay to ask.

**Medications** – A doctor, pharmacist, or the Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222) may be able to help you determine safe quantities for medicines to keep on hand.

**Alcohol** – Alcohol increases the potential for an at-risk person to attempt suicide and increase the lethality of suicide attempts. Keep only small quantities at home.



541.475.6575

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## The First Step

is always the hardest.

That's why we're here.

To serve our community  
and each other.

To show compassion and  
offer solutions.

To provide hope for  
tomorrow and  
confidence for today.

*We're here when you're  
ready.*



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**Our Mission:** To reach Jefferson County's full potential through progressive partnerships among community members and professionals.

**Our Values:** Integrity | Inclusiveness | Enthusiasm

[www.BestCarePrevention.com](http://www.BestCarePrevention.com)

