



Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Dealing With Grief

Fortunately, there are many constructive and healthy ways to deal with grief. These can include:

- **Journaling** – Many people find comfort in writing out their thoughts and feelings during the grieving period. Some even decide to write letters to the deceased or lost person. This can be a very good way to express feelings that people may not feel comfortable sharing with others and to avoid bottling up of emotions, which can extend the grief process or lead to other physical/emotional problems.
- **Talking with an Intimate** – Others find that talking with a close family member or friend is beneficial and allows them to share memories about the lost relationship or emotions that they are feeling.
- **Getting Professional Help** – Some people decide that they are not comfortable sharing their feelings with close friends and family. Alternatively, they may feel that they do not wish to burden those around them who are also suffering. In these cases, many choose to speak with a professional grief therapist. In a typical psychotherapy intervention, the therapist will both encourage the person to share feelings and thoughts about the loss and will encourage and challenge them to do things (such as to be a part of social activities, to exercise, etc.) that will help themselves to reengage life and get better. It can be an empowering process to speak with someone that understands the grief process and can help to normalize the emotions or reactions that are being felt.
- **Medication** - Grief therapists and other doctors that might be consulted during times of grief may suggest that a prescription for anti-depressant or anti-anxiety medications would be helpful. When taken as directed by a doctor, such medicines can be extremely helpful for managing extreme grief symptoms (such as unremitting sadness, anxiety, or confusion, etc.). Since grief is not an illness so much as it is a life process, it is unwise to rely purely on medicines as a way to manage grief related pain. Properly used medicines can take the edge off the worst grief symptoms. They cannot speed the process of recovery and regrowth that must inevitably occur for grief to resolve.
- **Support Groups** – For those that don't want to speak to an intimate friend or family member or a counselor one-on-one, a community-based or internet-based support group is an option. Many people find it comforting to speak with others who are experiencing similar types of loss and who are at different stages of the grieving process. As is the case with individual therapy, support group support can help to normalize what grieving people are feeling.

It can be difficult for someone who is grieving to know when grieving will be completed. Grief can be an extended process. It has no set timeframe for finishing. Though the passage of time provides little clue as to whether or when grieving will be done, there are several signs that indicate when people are starting to complete the process.

During the deepest stages of grief, people may feel that there is nothing to live for and that all of life is negative. Grieving people also often feel tremendous loyalty for their lost relationship and resist anything that they perceive will take them away from honoring that lost relationship. They are likely to feel very sad and lost. They are likely to be psychologically oriented towards honoring events that occurred in the past rather than events that are presently occurring, or which they might look forward to under other circumstances in the future. Important signs that grief is winding down therefore include the slow return of the ability to feel pleasure and joy again, the return of a present or future-facing orientation (e.g., looking forward to things in the future again), and the return of desire for reaching out to others and re-engaging in life.

The transition from a sad focus on the past to a re-engaged hopeful focus on the present and future does not happen all at once. Rather, it occurs in bits and pieces in a back and forth manner. Grieving people may start to feel guilty when they realize that they do not want to remain grieving. They may see their recovery from grief as an abandonment of their past relationship and resist this perceived abandonment. Of course, it is not disloyal or dishonorable to a lost relationship for grieving people to find new ways to feel happy again – but it can feel that way. In time the guilt feelings tend to subside too as life continues.

A final sign that grief is ending occurs when grieving people are able to think about their lost person, place or thing more as a happy past memory and less as a painful present absence. They may still feel pain at the loss, but it is not as acute as it once was.