

# Working Through Grief & Loss

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## **Questionnaire:**

1. Have you lost a loved one and are having difficulty focusing on school, work, friends, family or other aspects of everyday life?
  2. Have you been experiencing waves of anger, sadness, pain, or disbelief at unexpected times that are difficult to control?
  3. Are you experiencing an intense preoccupation with the life of the person who died?
  4. Have you noticed mood changes over the slightest situations?
  5. Have you been experiencing difficulty sleeping or dreaming of the person frequently?
  6. Have you been experiencing an emptiness in your stomach or loss of appetite.
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7. Are you hearing the loved ones voice or seeing their face?
  8. Are you experiencing a need to remember, tell, and retell stories about the person who died?

## **Grief**

If you answered “yes” to some of the questions mentioned above then you may be experiencing “grief.” After we experience the death of someone close, it is normal that our world feels upside down. Everyday tasks may seem overwhelming or you may even lose the willingness to start or complete them. During this time it is encouraged to reach out for support. CCA’s counseling staff can offer you sessions to talk about your mix of feelings and allow space for you to cry, be angry, or share feelings of guilt, disbelief, or relief. We understand that a range of emotions are normal and allowing time to go through the natural process of grief will eventually help to ease the pain. It is highly recommended to seek professional help if you are feeling helpless, having thoughts of suicide, and feelings of hopelessness.

**Please contact CCA’s 24/7 Mental Health Crisis hotline at: 510 594 5099.**

## **Natural grief responses can be seen and felt through many forms.**

People experience grief in many different ways. It can be emotional, physical, behavioral, cognitive and spiritual. At times, grief may feel overwhelming. It is important to remember that grief is not a problem to be solved, but rather, a process to be lived. If you or someone you know is grieving, these are some of the natural grief responses that may be experienced:

### **Grief can be experienced emotionally:**

- Sadness – a sense of sorrow
- Helplessness – difficulty in performing activities of daily living
- Hopelessness – feelings that life may not be worth living
- Fearfulness – that they or someone else will die or that they are going crazy

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- Anger – that the death has occurred or that the person has left them
  - Guilt – over something said or not said; something they did or did not do
  - Yearning- longing or aching for one more touch, conversation or moment together

**Grief can be experienced physically or behaviorally:**

- Changes in sleep or appetite – eating or sleeping more or less than before
- Emptiness or pain – felt physically in the chest, stomach, or elsewhere in the body
- Restlessness – inability to sit still or concentrate
- Lethargy – exhaustion or a lack of energy
- Tears- “grief bursts” that can occur at unexpected times
- Distracted behaviors- constant work or relocation; self-destructive or addictive behaviors
- Reminiscing- telling or retelling stories about the person who died; wanting to keep things exactly as they were; looking at pictures

**Grief can be experienced cognitively:**

- Disbelief – feeling as though the death isn’t real or an inability to believe that it has actually happened.
- Forgetfulness – not finishing what is started; absentmindedness
- Poor focus- difficulty concentrating on tasks or lack of motivation
- Questioning- asking or wondering why the death occurred

**Grief can be experienced spiritually:**

- Searching for meaning- wondering about the purpose in life

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- Altering personal beliefs- values or beliefs may be questioned or strengthened
  - A sense of the person's presence- hearing their voice, seeing their face or dreaming of the person

**When we experience these emotions here are some ways to cope:**

Please remember that these are all natural responses and normal grief responses. There is no timeline for the heart when it comes to natural grief responses and all feelings can come in waves. But as you continue the healing process understand that the feelings will not always be as raw, intense, or constant. Giving voice to your emotions helps the healing process and allows for hope. If you are experiencing grief, talk, and cry when you need to.

**1) Give Yourself Time**

Let your heart not your head determine how you feel. Everyone grieves differently and at their own pace.

**2) Share Your Thoughts**

Allow yourself to think and feel thoughts and emotions when they arise. Discuss these feelings with someone you trust.

**3) Take Care of Yourself**

Rest, Exercise, & Diet – Grief can leave you physically exhausted. It is important to take care of yourself and give yourself the extra strength you need.

**4) Journal**

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Be spontaneous. Write whatever seems important at the moment. Express your anger, sadness and memories. Ask yourself: What do I notice about my grief today? What is getting easier, what is still hard? How are people responding to my grief? What would I want my loved one to know? Journaling can help lessen the pain you are feeling.

### **5) Write a Letter to the Person Who Died**

This is an opportunity to tell your loved one how much you love or miss them, or how angry, sorry or sad you are. Maybe you didn't have the chance to say goodbye or heal an old wound, always imagining that there would be plenty of time.

### **6) Take a Trip Down Memory Lane**

Memories can help you stay connected to the person who died. You can wear something that belonged to them (i.e. a favorite hat, ring, or sweater). It can give you a sense of comfort to hold or touch something of theirs. You can place pictures and special mementos into a scrapbook or memory box. Remember, if memories are too painful right now, then it is okay to put them away for awhile and return to them later when the time is right.

### **7) Crying**

Crying is just one expression of grief. There is a saying, "What soap is for the body, tears are for the soul". Tears are not a sign of weakness. If you feel like crying, let your tears flow.

### **8) Share Your Memories**

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Sharing memories with others can help you maintain a sense of connection to the person who died. Retelling stories and reminiscing about days gone by can help keep your loved one an ongoing part of your day-to-day life.

### **9) Find Support**

Grief can be very isolating. Whether you speak to someone individually or join a grief support group, reach out and find people who know how to listen. This can help normalize the myriad of feelings you are experiencing.

### **10) Be Gentle With Yourself**

It may be 5 days, 5 months, 5 years or longer since your loved one died, and you may still experience moments of grief so intense they take you by surprise. While these grief bursts may occur from time to time, you will continue to heal. Be gentle and patient with yourself as you move forward into a full and meaningful life.

## **Tips for Grieving College Students**

There is no “right or wrong way” to grieve. But there are some healthy vs unhealthy coping strategies: Please continue reading some tips on healthy ways to continue your grief journey.

1. Give yourself time to rest and allow yourself time before getting back to your typical activities.
2. Don't over schedule yourself in hopes that it will distract you, grief can take up a lot of our energy even if we don't notice it.
3. Take care of your health. Practice good self-care by remembering to eat healthy foods, even if you don't have an appetite.

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4. If you are religious contact your place of worship to find resources they might offer.
  5. Speak with others who have also experienced similar grief. These people can empathize with you and you could offer one another support with time.
  6. Understand your grief process and do what feels right for you. You may prefer focusing on an activity versus talking, finding meaning through volunteering, spreading awareness, or doing both!
  7. Be patient with your grief. Avoid making a deadline for your grief to end. Remember grief comes in ebbs and flows and there is no time limit.
  8. Express your grief. Remember it is important to find ways to let it out. Some people express themselves through music, art, poetry, and journaling. Do what feels right for you.
  9. Pay attention to your physical health. Grief can be a great stress on your body and mind. Exercise can be a great way to release endorphins that your body can find useful.
  10. Be mindful of your sleep patterns at this time. Although it may be difficult obtaining at least 7-8 hours of sleep will be most beneficial. Maybe make an appointment with a healthcare professional if you are having trouble sleeping.

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11. Remember that as you move forward, there may be reminders that trigger physical or emotional symptoms of grief. Remember this is not a sign of weakness but a reminder that your grief journey is still continuing.
  12. Anniversary of the person's birthday or death may trigger physical or emotional symptoms that you experienced during the time of loss. On these days you can create special memories you had with that person, listen to songs that you both may have enjoyed, look through photos, plant a garden, volunteer or support a cause they believed in . Celebrate their lives in a way that feels right to you!
  13. Resist the temptation to self-medicate or cope with drugs or alcohol. This will not resolve the underlying feelings you are experiencing at this time. Some might think this is a really nice way to get rid of your problems, but the reality is that they are still there when the substances are gone. Researchers have also found that these substances can actually delay your grief journey.
  14. Have a little fun. Do something to make you laugh and/or smile. Many may find this difficult to do at first, but it is wonderful medicine for the grieving soul.
  15. Don't judge yourself or let others judge you. You are allowed to grieve for as long and as deeply as you need to. No one can tell you when to "move on" or "get over it." It's okay to be angry, relieved, in a state of disbelief, cry or not cry, laugh. Moments of joy are allowed, and completely normal, while you grieve and feel no guilt for having a moment without pain.

### **Supporting Someone who is Grieving a New Loss**

Supporting a friend or family member through grief can be difficult and knowing how to respond through helpful sayings and gestures can make all the difference. Below are some helpful ways to respond to a grieved loved one.

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## Instead of saying...

*"I'm sorry."*

This can be perceived as impersonal or inappropriate to the griever. They may respond with "What are you sorry about?"

*"I know how you feel" or "I know exactly what you are going through; my dog died."*

Saying this may cause the bereaved person to feel that you are devaluing their individual grief. Very early on, grievers don't want to hear about someone else's grief experience.

*"You are looking so much better, are you feeling better yet?"*

Grievors often resent being given the message that others need them to be all better.

*"You're not grieving right. You should do it this way..."*

Remember that there is no "right" way to grieve. Grief is personal and will be different for each person.

## Try saying...

*"My condolences." or "I am so sorry to hear of the death of\_\_\_"*

Saying this acknowledges the person's experience and gives them an opportunity to talk about the person who died or about how they are feeling.

*"I can only begin to imagine what you are going through and how you are feeling."*

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This statement demonstrates that you are truly focusing on them and their unique process. Ask them what it is like for them. Don't assume that you know what they are feeling or thinking.

*"I don't know what to say, but I am here. We can talk if you want or I can just be here with you."*

Though it can sometimes feel uncomfortable to sit with someone in silence, it may be better than saying something that isn't helpful.

*"Are there times of day that are harder or easier for you? What are some of the things that bring you comfort?"*

## **Myths and Facts about Grief**

**MYTH: The pain will go away faster if you ignore it.**

**Fact:** Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will only make it worse in the long run. For real healing, it is necessary to face your grief and actively deal with it.

**MYTH: It's important to be "be strong" in the face of loss.**

**Fact:** Feeling sad, frightened or lonely is a normal reaction to loss. Crying doesn't mean you are weak. You don't need to "protect" your family or friends by putting on a brave front. Showing your true feelings can help them and you.

**MYTH: If you don't cry, it means you aren't sorry about the loss.**

**Fact:** Crying is a normal response to sadness, but it's not the only one. Those who don't cry may feel the pain just as deeply as others. They may simply have other ways of showing it.

**MYTH: Grief should last about a year.**

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**Fact:** There is no right or wrong timeframe for grieving. How long it takes can differ from person to person. At HealGrief, we believe that grief doesn't go away — we just learn how to manage it differently day by day.

(taken from the <https://healgrief.org/understanding-grief/>)

## **Finding Grief Support**

### **Institute of Aging**

<https://www.ioaging.org/services/all-inclusive-health-care/psychological-services/center-for-elderly-suicide-prevention/grief-services>

### **GriefShare: Support Groups in Bay Area**

<https://www.griefshare.org/groups/search>

### **Grief Support Groups on Meetup.com**

[https://www.meetup.com/topics/grief-support/us/ca/san\\_francisco/](https://www.meetup.com/topics/grief-support/us/ca/san_francisco/)

### **Grief Support Groups and Specialists on Psychology Today**

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/groups/ca/san-francisco/144206?sid=5e755c0e34ce6&ref=3&tr=ResultsName>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/groups/grief/ca/san-francisco/19857?sid=5e75612f8c9a7&ref=3&tr=ResultsName>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/groups/grief/ca/san-francisco/129877?sid=5e75612f8c9a7&ref=4&tr=ResultsName>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/groups/grief/ca/san-francisco/40479?sid=5e75612f8c9a7&ref=8&tr=ResultsName>

### **Specialized support groups through Mission Hospice:**

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Free. Everyone is welcome; registration is required. These semi-structured support groups meet for about 8 weeks. These groups are in San Mateo unless otherwise indicated. Schedules and locations are subject to change. For details and to register, or if you are interested in a specific topic for a support group or workshop, please contact Isabel at 650.931.8236 or by email.

- Writing Through Loss Support Group (no experience necessary)  
Wednesdays, January 22–March 11, 2020 • 6:30-8pm  
Wednesdays, May 20–July 8, 2020 • 6:30-8pm
- Loss of a Parent Support Group  
Thursdays, January 30–March 19, 2020 • 6-7:30pm
- Grief and Fostering Resilience  
Thursdays, February 6–March 26, 2020 • 6-7:30pm  
*Coastside Adult Day Health Center, 925 Main Street, Half Moon Bay*
- Resilience in Grief: From Surviving to Thriving (for adults who have been grieving a loss for at least six months)  
Tuesdays, February 18–March 24, 2020 • 2-4pm
- Suicide Loss Support Group  
Wednesdays, March 25–May 13, 2020 • 6-7:30pm
- Spouse/Partner Loss Support Group  
Wednesdays, April 22–June 10, 2020 • 10-11:30am  
*San Bruno Senior Center, 1555 Crystal Springs Road, San Bruno*

<https://www.missionhospice.org/services/bereavement-support/>

## Recommended Readings

### Loss of a friend:

- Living When a Loved One Has Died, Earl A. Grollman
- I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye, Brook Noel
- Grieving the Death of a Friend, Harold Ivan Smith

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## Loss of a parent:

- Dear Martha, WTF?, Tricia LaVoice
- Gracefully Gone, Alicia Coppola
- Early Winter, Howard Bronson
- Living Through Mourning, Harriet S. Schiff
- Recovering From the Loss of a Parent, Katherine Donnelly
- Things I Wish I Knew Before My Mom Died: Coping with Loss Every Day, Ty Alexander
- Losing Your Parents, Finding Yourself, Victoria Secunda
- When Parents Die: A Guide for Adults, Edward Myers
- Motherless Daughters, Hope Edelman
- Always Too Soon, Allison Gilbert
- The Orphaned Adult: Understanding and Coping with Grief and Change after the Death of our Parents, Alexander Levy
- Death Benefits: How Losing a Parent Can Change an Adult's Life –for the Better, Jeanne Safer
- Death of a Parent: Transition to a New Adult Identity, Debra Umberson

## Death By Suicide:

- Grieving a Suicide: A Loved One's Search for Comfort, Answers and Hope, Albert Y. Hsu
- Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide, Christopher Lukas
- Life After Suicide: Finding Courage, Comfort & Community After Unthinkable Loss, Jennifer Ashton
- After a Parent's Suicide: Helping Children Heal, Margo Requarth
- No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One, Carla Fine
- When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens About Grieving & Healing, Marilyn E. Gootman
- Living With Grief After Sudden Loss, Kenneth Doka

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- I Wasn't Ready To Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping & Healing after the Sudden Death of a Loved One, Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair, Ph.D.

### **Additional Recommended Readings:**

- Saying Goodbye to Someone You Love: Your Emotional Journey Through End of Life and Grief, Norine Dresser and Fredda Wasserman
- Living with Loss, Healing with Hope, Rabbi Earl A. Grollman
- Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief, Martha Whitmore Hickman
- Tear Soup, Pat and Chuck DeKlyen Schwiebert
- Healing Your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas, Alan D. Wolfelt
- Making Loss Matter, David Wolpe

### **References:**

The information above is from the 'Our House Grief Support Center' website:

from: <https://www.ourhouse-grief.org/grief-pages/grieving-adults/natural-grief-responses/>

<https://healgrief.org/actively-moving-forward/young-adult-grief/>