

Tips for coping with grief and loss

The death of a friend or family member is a very painful experience, and everyone experiences and deals with grief and sorrow in different ways. The loss of a loved one often brings about feelings such as fear, anger, guilt, loneliness or even relief. There is no right or wrong way to grieve or deal with a loss. We would therefore like to provide you with a short overview of possible reactions to grief and how these can be coped with.

The feeling of grief and sorrow normally fades with time. However, these feelings can resurface when faced with certain situations (such as on the birthday of a lost loved one, or on the anniversary of their death.) There are different phases within the grieving process and they usually do not occur chronologically, but they can instead come about at various times and in any order. There are different strategies on how to cope with grief that are dependent on which phase of the grieving process you are currently in.

Shock Phase

In this phase, the feeling of despair is usually most predominant. The grieving person cannot come to terms with the loss and often tries to carry on as if the deceased person were still alive.

Tips:

- Confront yourself with the loss by visiting the grave, looking at pictures of the deceased person, or reading condolence messages.
- Do not come to any hasty decisions regarding your own plans for your life.

Overwhelming Emotions Phase

In this phase, the grieving person is often met with overwhelming emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, guilt or emptiness. Exaggerated reactions can come as a result as well as increased irritability and problems with concentration and functioning normally.

Tips:

- Try to allow all feeling to arise and then recognize them and accept them.
- Write down your feelings, maybe even as a letter to the deceased person, and confront yourself with your thoughts and emotions.
- Speak with those close to you.
- Treat yourself with care and compassion and make sure that you are getting a balanced diet, enough sleep and some exercise.
- Give yourself the room to also experience positive activities and breaks from your grief.

Reorientation Phase

Even if the pain is still there, the grieving person will start to turn to other things again. This can sometimes lead to a guilty conscience and cause the impression of being torn between their own needs and dealing with the loss.

Tips:

- Create new personal goals and try to stick to them. Keep in mind what the deceased person would have liked for you to do.
- Decide which keepsakes you would like for yourself and get rid of all remaining things that belonged to the deceased person.
- To still give yourself the space to grieve, grieving rituals can be introduced for a limited period of time.

Further reading (in German):

Znoj, H. (2004). Komplizierte Trauer. Hogrefe: Göttingen.

Wolf, D. (2015). Einen geliebten Menschen verlieren. Eine Begleitung durch die Trauer. PAL Verlagsgesellschaft: Mannheim.