**How can you cope with grief?**

- Talk to family or friends
- Seek counseling
- Read poetry or books
- Engage in social activities
- Exercise
- Eat good foods
- Seek spiritual support
- Take time to relax
- Join a support group
- Listen to music
- Be patient with yourself
- Let yourself feel grief

Each one of us has an individual style of coping with painful times. The list above may help you generate ideas about how to manage your feelings of grief. You may want to experiment with these ideas or create a list of your own. Talking to friends who have dealt with loss in the past can help you generate new ways of coping. Only you know what coping skills will fit best with your personality and lifestyle.

One way to examine your own style of coping is to recall the ways you've dealt with painful times in the past. It's important to note that some ways of coping with grief are helpful, like talking to others, writing in a journal, and so forth. Others may be hurtful or destructive to the healing process, like substance abuse or isolation. Healthy coping skills are important in resolving a loss. They cannot take away your feelings of loss. They can, however, help you move forward in the healing process.

**How can you support others who are grieving?**

- Be a good listener
- Ask about their feelings
- Just sit with them
- Share your feelings
- Ask about their loss
- Remember the loss
- Make telephone calls
- Acknowledge the pain
- Let them feel sad
- Be available when you can
- Do not minimize grief
- Talk about your own losses

People who are grieving often feel isolated or lonely in their grief. Soon after the loss, social activities and support from others may decrease. As the shock of the loss fades, there is a tendency on the part of the griever to feel more pain and sadness. Well-meaning friends may avoid discussing the subject due to their own discomfort with grief or their fear of "making the person feel bad." They may "not know what to say."

People who are grieving are likely to fluctuate between wanting some time to themselves and wanting closeness with others. They may want someone to talk to about their feelings. Showing concern and thoughtfulness about a friend shows that you care. It's better to feel nervous and awkward sitting with a grieving friend than to not sit there at all.

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**Life After Loss: Dealing with Grief**

**University Health, Wellness, and Counseling Services**

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Different Kinds of Loss
Feelings of loss are very personal, and only you know what is significant to you. People commonly associate certain losses with strong feelings of grief. These can include:

Death of a partner  Death of a classmate
Death of a roommate  Loss of a close friend
Death of a parent/child  Serious illness
Death of a sibling  Relationship breakup
Death of a relative

Subtle or less obvious losses can also cause strong feelings of grief, even though those around you may not know the extent of your feelings. Some examples include:

Loss of health through illness
Loss of mental ability
Change of job
Graduation from school
Loss of physical ability or financial security
Leaving home or moving to a new home
Death of a pet

Sudden vs. Predictable Loss
Sudden or shocking losses—due to events like crimes, accidents, or suicide—can be traumatic. There is no way to prepare. They can challenge your sense of security and confidence in the predictability of life. You may experience symptoms such as sleep disturbance, nightmares, distressing thoughts, social isolation, or severe anxiety.

Predictable losses—like those due to terminal illness—sometimes allow more time to prepare for the loss. However, they create two layers of grief: the grief related to the anticipation of the loss and the grief related to the final loss.

How long does grief last?
The length of the grief process is different for everyone. There is no predictable schedule for grief. Although it can be quite painful at times, the grief process cannot be rushed. It is important to be patient with yourself as you experience the feelings and your unique reactions to the loss. With time and support, things generally do get better. However, it is normal for significant dates, holidays, or other reminders to trigger feelings related to the loss. Taking care of yourself, seeking support, and acknowledging your feelings during these times are ways that can help you cope.

Normal Grief Reactions
When experiencing grief, it is common to feel . . .
- like you are “going crazy”
- unable to focus or concentrate
- irritable or angry (at the deceased, oneself, others, higher powers)
- frustrated or misunderstood
- anxious, nervous, or fearful
- like you want to “escape”
- guilt or remorse
- ambivalence
- numbness

Grief as a Process of Healing
It is important to note that the grief process is not linear, but is more often experienced in cycles. Grief is sometimes compared to climbing a spiral staircase, where things can look and feel like you are just going in circles, yet you are actually making progress. Patience with the process and allowing feelings to come without judgment can help. If you feel stuck in your grief, talking to a counselor or a supportive person may help you move forward in the healing process.

Culture, Rituals, and Ceremonies
Your cultural background can affect how you understand and approach the grief process. Some cultures anticipate a “time to grieve” and have developed rituals to help people through the grieving process. Support from others can be a reminder that grief is a universal experience and that you are not alone. After a significant loss, some cultures have mourning rituals to mark the passage of time and help individuals reconnect with their ordinary lives.

A mourning ritual can occur during a meaningful time, like an anniversary, wake, or holiday, or at a distinct location, like a church, synagogue, or home. In North American cultures, for example, there are the Catholic anniversary mass, the reciting of Kaddish, and El Dia de los Muertos. Many ceremonies have spontaneously grown up around the Vietnam War Memorial, and a special mourning project, the AIDS Quilt, traveled throughout the nation to enable mourners to participate in this expression of grief. Grief rituals and ceremonies acknowledge the pain of loss while also offering social support and a reaffirmation of life.

You may not be conscious of how your own cultural background affects your grieving process. Talking with family, friends, or clergy is one way to strengthen your awareness of possible cultural influences in your life. Friends and family may be able to help you generate ideas to create your own rituals. Some have found solace in creating their own unconventional ceremonies, such as a funeral or ceremony with personal friends in a private setting.