



## CPS Facts

# GRIEF

*Loss can happen at any time, but it usually catches us unprepared. Loss comes in many forms—losing a relationship, a job, a beloved pet, or some aspect of your health—all capable of evoking profound pain and grief.*

*Grief is a natural response to life-changing loss. While each person grieves differently and deals with different losses in different ways, the grieving process itself is the same, as well as its ultimate goal, acceptance of new circumstances.*



Therapists and counselors who work with grieving clients recognize different facets of the process, which may or may not occur sequentially. Shock and denial are often the first reaction to loss. Denial is a natural anesthetic and may be quite useful as a mechanism to permit a basic level of functioning at a time when the full impact of grief could be devastating. Denial may be succeeded by, or alternate with, a range of powerful emotions, including guilt, anger (at the loss itself, the person who is gone, or God), and extreme sadness. For many people this depth of sadness is a necessary part of the grieving process, because it represents unconscious acceptance of the loss. When acceptance becomes conscious, the loss can be assimilated—in some cases even perceived as a gift that opens a new phase of life.

Despite the difficult nature of the grieving process, it's important not to avoid or ignore it. If you do, suppressed grief may resurface and affect your physical and mental well-being when you're facing another loss.

Deborah Morris Coryell, co-founder and president of the Shiva Foundation, a nonprofit organization in Santa Fe, New Mexico, that's dedicated to promoting the understanding of grief, explains, "You must step up to your grief, meet it, and embrace it. Once you do that, grief begins to teach you—for example to recognize your hidden strengths, to be more compassionate, and to realize the preciousness of what you have. Everyone of us is changed by our losses. The challenge is to use the loss as a pathway into some greater wholeness."

### ▼ Coping with loss

- *Initially, take a break from your routine responsibilities.* Ask family and friends for specific kinds of help, such as meal preparation or child care.
- *Talk about your feelings* with family, friends, clergy, or spiritual advisors. Many people find it therapeutic to share their memories of the person who died or to speak at a memorial service or funeral.
- *Use creative outlets such as writing, art, or music* to express your feelings and work through grief. You may find it helpful to write a journal, poetry, a book of memories, or even a letter to the person who died.
- *Allow yourself to cry.* Crying is a natural response to pain and the emotional release it provides can be both cleansing and healing.
- *Take care of yourself.* Grief can depress the immune system. So make every effort to eat well and remain physically active to counteract the stress. Grieving can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Make time for extra rest and sleep.



- *Practice breathwork to relieve stress.* Simply observing your breath can help you to stay “centered” in your body when your mind feels agitated. Deep breathing provides natural calming.
- *Be patient with yourself.* You may feel pressure to “get on with your life,” but research suggests that intense grieving typically lasts from three months to a year after the death of a loved one. Acknowledging the long-term nature of grieving (and the ups and downs of the process) can help ease your mind. In addition, try to avoid making major decisions (moving, changing a job, etc.) for at least a year after the significant loss.
- *Consider joining a bereavement group.* Such groups offer comfort, compassion, and companionship.
- *Consider seeing a grief counselor.* If you need additional support or feel “stuck” in your grieving process, speak with a counselor who is well-trained to help with this difficult time.
- *Watch for signs of being overwhelmed by grief,* such as recurrent thoughts of suicide or severe difficulty with basic functioning for months after the initial event. If you notice these signs, seek help from a mental-health professional.
- *Make time for diversion and fun.* Give yourself permission to take a break from grieving and to enjoy yourself. Laughter can be a great stress-reducer.
- *Transform your grief into action.* In time, grief prompts some people to rethink their priorities. Volunteer for a cause close to the deceased, establish a memorial scholarship, or take some other positive action. Says Coryell: “To continue to be in the presence of someone you love after death, you need only act positively on their behalf. And, not only are you again with them, but they live on for others as well.”

### ▼ When others grieve

When someone you know loses a loved one, it’s natural to want to offer sympathy and support. Yet, many people feel unsure of how to do so. Here are some practical ways to help a person who is grieving:

- ▼ Offer to visit. Your presence can be a tremendous comfort
- ▼ Acknowledge the loss, pain, and hurt. Let them know that you’ve been thinking about them.
- ▼ Listen without giving advice or telling the person what they should feel. Don’t claim to know how they are feeling. Be accepting of tears.
- ▼ Share your memories and don’t be afraid to use the name of the person who died.
- ▼ Share a hug, a handclasp, or a shoulder to cry on.
- ▼ Offer specific help—such as preparing a meal, helping with household chores, or running errands—rather than making a vague offer to “Call me when you need help.”
- ▼ Avoid clichés and religious platitudes such as “It all happened for the best” or “It was God’s will.”
- ▼ Don’t suggest the deceased can be replaced by a new spouse, another child, or a pet.
- ▼ As time passes, don’t try to rush the bereaved by saying “You should be over it by now” or “It’s time to put this behind you.”
- ▼ Stay in touch, particularly during difficult times such as anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, or the day of the death.



For more information,  
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