



Family Caregiver Education Series

Handling Grief and Loss

July 8, 2021 • 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.

(Question & Answer session 11:30 a.m. – 12 noon)

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Understanding Grief and Loss

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Pre-Loss Grief



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Pre-Loss Grief

- ❑ The process of losing someone you love . . .
a confusing process of holding on while letting go.
- ❑ The person who is dying also may experience grief.
- ❑ It may include four things all at once:
 1. What you've already lost,
 2. What you're in the process of losing,
 3. What you might fear losing in the future, and
 4. Freeing yourself from emotional ties with your loved one.



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Pre-loss grief IS normal.

- The grief you might be feeling is very real and likely overwhelming because it can include any or all of the thoughts or feelings experienced during the grieving process that follows death.



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Acknowledge your losses.

- Allow yourself to acknowledge that, although your loved one hasn't died, you ARE grieving.



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Grief can affect a person in various ways

Physically,
Emotionally,
Mentally, Socially,
and Spiritually

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Physically

- Loss of appetite.
- Sudden illness/aches/pains.
- Hollow feeling in your stomach.
- Headaches.
- Unable to sleep.



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Emotionally

- Loneliness.
- Worry.
- Anxiety.
- Fear.
- Anger.
- Impatience.
- Lack focus/concentration.



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Socially

- Withdrawing from family or friends.
- Isolating.
- Loss of interest.



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Spiritually

- ❑ Feeling powerless.
- ❑ Spiritual searching.
- ❑ Finding meaning.
- ❑ Anger at God.
- ❑ Abandoning faith.
- ❑ Strengthening faith.



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Take Care of Yourself

- ❑ Plan to carve out some time for yourself; it IS healthy.
- ❑ Neglecting yourself can lead to depression and physical illnesses.
- ❑ Make time to go to your doctor – then don't skip the appointment.
- ❑ Eat clean: Eat food that is nutritious; avoid processed food, sugar, and enriched flour. Drink lots of water. Avoid caffeine and alcohol.



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Take Care of Yourself (cont.)

- ❑ Rest when you can. Use deep breathing exercises for stress reduction.
- ❑ When feeling anxious or panicky, use a grounding activity.
- ❑ Walk in nature even if that means walking around the block.



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A Grounding Activity

When you're feeling anxious, look around you, whether indoors or outside in nature . . .

- ❑ Name five things you can see.
- ❑ Name four things you can hear.
- ❑ Name three things you can touch.
- ❑ Name two things you can smell.
- ❑ Name one thing you love to taste, or one good thing about yourself.



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4-7-8 Deep Breathing Activity

-Andrew Weil, M.D.

This is a useful tool for achieving a relaxed and clear state of mind.

- Sit with your back straight. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth then keep it there through the activity. This invokes activity with the vagus nerve to relax.
- Exhale completely through your mouth making a "whoosh" sound.
- Close your mouth, then inhale through your nose to a count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Exhale completely through your mouth to a count of eight.
- Repeat this cycle three more times.

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Healthy Grieving

***"You don't heal from loss because time passes.
You heal because of what you DO with the time."***

Make a list of ways you can grieve in a healthy way.

- People I feel comfortable talking to . . .
- Nice things I can do for myself . . .
- Ways to express what I'm feeling (writing, art, movement, talking) . . .
- Ways to increase my energy when it is feeling low . . .
- Ways to get the right amount of sleep . . .
- Nutritious food to keep my body healthy . . .
- Healthy restaurant meals I can order/take out/have delivered . . .



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Reflect on the remaining time.

Though what we want may not always be possible, do your best to spend your remaining time together in a way you and your loved one find meaningful.

- ❑ Tie up any loose ends.
- ❑ Make amends by forgiving any real or presumed injuries.
- ❑ Review your life together: What you have learned; what was joyful.
- ❑ Review practical matters or tasks you will be taking over from your loved one.
- ❑ Discuss funeral/burial/cremation arrangements.



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Say your good-byes.

- ❑ Even if your loved one is unconscious or very near death, express your love and let him/her know how much s/he'll be missed and how much your relationship has meant.



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Ira Byock, M.D.

Suggests four things to share with your loved one that matter most for loving and dying well:

1. Please forgive me.
2. I forgive you.
3. Thank you.
4. I love you.
5. I'll miss you (#5 added by me).



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Feeling relief is normal.

- Relief is a normal human reaction.
- There is no need to feel guilt – you did nothing wrong.
- It does not mean you loved the person any less.



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Grief will happen.

- ❑ Pre-loss grief will neither mitigate nor amplify your post-death grieving process.
- ❑ You will grieve in your own way.
- ❑ Honor your grief.
- ❑ Be gentle with yourself.



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After-Loss Grief



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Grieving after loss is similar to the pre-loss grieving process. . .

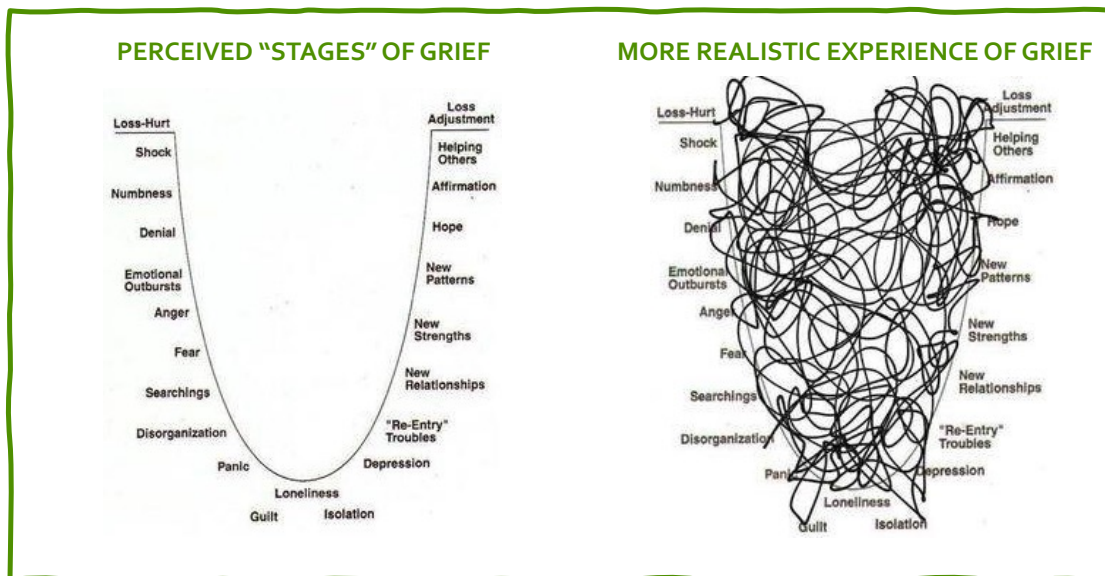
But there ARE differences:

1. Realizing the finality of death.
2. Assuming new roles or losing other roles.
3. Facing paperwork and the frustrations of doing so.
4. Possible unexpected trajectory; it takes as long as it takes – for YOU.
5. Guilty thoughts.



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There are 14 types of guilt, including . . .

- Death causation: Intentional act or neglect.
- Role guilt: *What should I have done that I didn't do? What didn't I see?*
- If-only guilt: *If only I had done something that would have changed the course of the illness.*
- Relief guilt: Relief after watching someone suffer for a prolonged period of time.
- Grief guilt: *What would a perfect grieving process be like? Am I doing it right?* There are no steps or certain order to grieve. Grieving is a very organic process and everyone grieves differently.
- Recovery guilt: Living life in a "new normal" without the loved one and feeling OK about moving forward.



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It is important to think realistically about your guilt.

- Ask if you really could have known _____ or why didn't I _____.
- I could have stopped _____!
- I should have _____ or I shouldn't have _____.

Then realize with "hindsight wisdom" . . .

I did the best I could with what I knew at the time.



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J. William Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning

1. To accept the reality of loss.
2. To process the pain of grief (physical, emotional, or behavioral).
3. To adjust to a world without your loved one.
4. To find a way to remember the deceased while embarking on the rest of one's journey through life. (Finding an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life; keeping them with us but still going on with life.)
Do what brings YOU comfort.



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Tips for Continuing Bonds with People We've Lost

- Talk to them – in your head or out loud.
- Write letters to them (journal, computer, long-hand); keep letters or create a ritual to release them.
- Keep photos of your loved one around.
- Include them in special events/holidays.
- Imagine advice they would give you when you're faced with tough decisions.



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More Tips for Continuing Bonds

- ❑ Take a trip they wanted to take (leave photos in special places).
- ❑ Plan for anniversaries/holidays (avoiding this can create anxiety/fear).
- ❑ Enjoy food they loved or enjoy food YOU love but they didn't.
- ❑ Be open to signs from your loved one: pennies, dragonflies, butterflies, hummingbirds, feathers, heart-shaped stones, etc.



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Everyone grieves differently.

Factors that influence the grieving process:

- ❑ The relationship you had with your loved one.
- ❑ The nature of the death: lingering, unexpected, violent.
- ❑ Your personality; how you cope; extroverted/introverted.
- ❑ Your physical health; activity helps with grief recovery.
- ❑ Your phase of life; adolescent, parent, empty nest, retired.
- ❑ Your life circumstances: finances, residence, job, children present.
- ❑ Your support system; absent, safe/directive, family/friends/faith.
- ❑ Your spiritual beliefs; comforting or challenging; why?



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Eight Things a Grieving Person Should Know

1. You are not alone. Death and grief are a natural/very human part of life. "We are not human being trying to be spiritual, but spiritual beings trying to be human."
2. Almost every thought, feeling, and behavior is normal as long as it is not illegal or self-destructive. Anxiety is a widespread reaction to death.
3. Crying is a gift; tears honor your loss and help relieve emotional pressure in a healthy way. Grief ambushes you.
4. You are lovable even when you are a confused mess. Honor your feelings – ALL of them. Grief is not one emotion but many.



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Eight Things a Grieving Person Should Know (cont.)

5. People are uncomfortable with grieving people. Find someone who CAN be there for you without judgment or directives.
6. No matter how bad you feel, you WILL survive. You can carry your wound through life, or you can find ways to heal.
7. Grief is exhausting – from practical disruptions, poor sleep, poor diet, demands of all kinds. If it seems as if there is no peace, create it.
8. Grief never really goes away. It evolves over time into manageable thoughts, memories, and feelings.



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Grief

a poem by Gwen Flowers

I had my own notion of grief.
 I thought it was the sad time
 That followed the death of someone you love.
 And you had to push through it
 To get to the other side.
 But I'm learning that there is no other side.
 There is no pushing through.
 But rather,
 There is absorption.
 Adjustment.
 Acceptance.
 And grief is not something you complete,
 But rather, you endure.
 Grief is not a task to finish
 And move on,
 But an element of yourself ~
 An alteration of your being.
 A new way of seeing.
 A new definition of self.

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Loss was like that . . .
 You didn't just lose a loved one.
 You lost your heart,
 your memories,
 your laughter,
 your brain,
 and it even took your bones.
 Eventually it all comes back,
 but different.
 Rearranged.

-Louise Penny
The Cruellest Month

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