

The Different Ways We Grieve

Each person grieves in very different and individual ways. Some have compared grief to snowflakes or fingerprints; each person's grief is both personal and unique.

Grief can be a highly emotional experience; you may feel many, even contradictory, emotions such as anger, guilt, loneliness, sadness, or pining for the person who died.

Your expression of grief may mirror these inner feelings through crying, rage, or withdrawal, and many people find it helpful to express and explore these emotions.

Others may grieve with less intense emotions.

You or someone you love may express grief in a more cognitive way, thinking about the person often. These types of grievers may find it helpful to be active in projects such as managing a scholarship fund to honor the person who has died.

These different ways or patterns of grief are just that; they are different. No pattern is better or worse. They are simply expressions of the fact that each person copes with loss in a personal way.

This can become problematic when there is a failure to acknowledge that people handle loss differently, even in the same family.

Differences in grieving styles are simply that; they do not represent differences in the love for the person who has died.

Different grieving styles do not need to be a source of conflict. In fact, complementary ways of coping can be a source of strength.

Grief can Affect Every area of our Lives

- **Physically:** Headaches, feeling tired, achy muscles and nausea.
- **Emotionally:** Sadness, anger, disbelief, despair, guilt and loneliness.
- **Mentally:** Forgetfulness, lack of concentration, confusion and poor memory.
- **Behaviorally:** Changes to sleeping patterns, dreams, or nightmares, or to your appetite. You might or might not want to go out or be around people. You may also experience unusual emotional reactions or feel weepy.
- **Socially:** Some friends may avoid you because they don't know what to say or how to help you. You might also feel pressure to be strong for family or friends, or you may not feel like seeing anyone.
- **Spiritually:** Your beliefs may be challenged, and you may struggle to have faith in the things that you once believed in.

Different Types of Grief

Normal Grief

There are no timelines and grief experiences generally vary from one individual to another. 'Normal Grief' simply refers to a grief response that falls under an extremely broad umbrella of predictability.

Reactions to a loss can be physical and psychological. It is not uncommon to experience periods of intense distress and feeling such as (but not limited to) the following: *longing, crying, dreaming of your loved one, anger, denial, sadness, despair, insomnia, fatigue, guilt, loss of interest, confusion and disorganization, disbelief, inability to concentrate, preoccupation with thoughts of your loved one, fleeting hallucinatory experiences, meaninglessness, withdrawal, avoidance, over-reacting, numbness, relief, sadness, yearning, fear, shame, loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness, emptiness, loss of appetite, weight gain.*

However, 'Normal Grief' is marked by movement towards acceptance of the loss and a gradual alleviation of the symptoms, as well as the ability to continue to engage in basic daily activities.

Anticipatory Grief:

As its name suggests, 'Anticipatory Grief' is the reaction to a death you were able to anticipate such as when an individual dies from a long-term illness. As soon as you accept and understand someone you love is going to die, you begin grieving.

Grief that occurs preceding a loss can be confusing, as you may feel conflicted or guilty for experiencing grief reactions about someone who is still here. You may experience anger, loss of emotional control, and helplessness. You may also feel grief over the loss of things other than the individual, such as loss of hopes and dreams for the future and the loss associated with a changing roles and family structures.

'Anticipatory Grief' is different than the grief response felt after a death and does not necessarily make the later any easier. However, it can allow those who love the individual to slowly and gradually prepare for and absorb the reality of the loss. Also, for some but not all, it allows for meaningful time spent with the individual leading to a *sense* of closure and peace.

Complicated Grief

Refers to grief reactions and feelings of loss that are debilitating, long lasting, and/or impair your ability to engage in daily activities. Other types of grief such as 'Chronic Grief', 'Delayed Grief', and 'Distorted Grief' all fall under the blanket of 'Complicated Grief'.

Although the concept of 'Complicated Grief' is well known and generally accepted, it's not without its detractors. There are some who believe 'Complicated Grief' is simply the manifestation of grief reactions combined with other mental disorders such as Depression and Anxiety.

Chronic Grief

Strong grief reactions that do not subside and last over a long period of time. Continually experiencing extreme distress over the loss with no progress towards feeling better or improving functioning.

Delayed Grief

When grief symptoms and reactions aren't experienced until long after a person's death or a much later time than is typical. The griever, who consciously or subconsciously avoids the reality and pain of the loss, suppresses these reactions.

Distorted Grief

Extreme, intense, or atypical reactions to a loss – odd changes in behavior and self-destructive actions. Anger and hostility towards oneself or others are common.

Cumulative Grief:

When one experiences a second loss while still grieving a first loss. This is also referred to as “bereavement overload” or “grief overload”.

Prolonged Grief

(Similar to ‘Chronic Grief’) Grief reactions that are prolonged and intense. The griever is incapacitated by grief and daily function is impaired on a long-term basis. The griever spends much time contemplating the death, longing for reunion, and is unable to adjust to life without the individual.

Exaggerated Grief

An overwhelming intensification of normal grief reactions that may worsen over time. Characterized by extreme and excessive grief reactions possibly to include nightmares, self-destructive behaviors, drug abuse, thoughts of suicide, abnormal fears, and the development or emergence of psychiatric disorders.

Secondary Loss:

When a loss impacts many areas of one's life, creating multiple losses stemming from the “primary loss”. Though it is easy to think our grief is solely the grief of

losing the person who died, our grief is also the pain of the other losses caused as a result of this death.

Masked Grief

Grief reactions that impair normal functioning however the individual is unable to recognize these symptoms and behaviors are related to the loss. Symptoms are often masked as either physical symptoms or other maladaptive behaviors.

Disenfranchised Grief:

One's grief is 'disenfranchised' when their culture, society, or support group, make them feel their loss and/or grief is invalidated and insignificant. This can occur when the death is stigmatized (suicide, overdose, HIV/AIDS, drunk driving), the relationship is seen as insignificant (ex-spouse, co-worker, miscarriage, pet) the loss is not a death (Dementia, Traumatic Brain Injury, Mental Illness, Substance Abuse).

Traumatic Grief

Normal grief responses experienced in combination with traumatic distress suffered as a result of a loved one dying in a way perceived to be frightening, horrifying, unexpected, violent and/or traumatic. Distress is extreme enough to impair daily functioning.

Collective Grief

Grief felt by a collective group such as a community, society, village, or nation as a result of an event such as a war, natural disaster, terrorist attack, death of a public figure, or any other event leading to mass casualties or national tragedy.

Ambiguous Loss: (See 'Disenfranchised Grief')

Losses that lack clarity and can lead to different views of who or what has been lost. Individuals and those around them may question whether a loss has occurred or if this is a loss that should validate deep emotional responses (such as with disenfranchised deaths).

Inhibited Grief

Occurs when an individual shows no outward signs of grief for an extended period of time. The individual inhibits their grief, eventually leading to physical manifestations and somatic complaints.

Abbreviated Grief

A short-lived grief response. The grieving process often seems shorter because the role of the deceased is immediately filled by someone/something else. Getting remarried after the death of a spouse for example is not a 'replacement' nor the fast track to end your grief but it may "appear" to be abbreviated grief.

Absent Grief

This is when the bereaved shows absolutely no signs of grief and acts as though nothing has happened. Characterized by complete shock or denial, especially in the face of a sudden loss. This becomes concerning when it goes on for an extended period of time. This does not account for differences in how we grieve and it's important to note that just because you can't tell someone is grieving doesn't mean they aren't.

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<https://au.reachout.com/articles/common-reactions-to-death>

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/types-of-grief/>

