

Grief Emotions

CREATED BY THE CENTRE
FOR GRIEF & HEALING

ADAPTED FROM DR. ALAN
D. WOLFELT



Sadness

Your feelings of sadness can leave you feeling isolated and alone. Consequently, you will need to talk them out with accepting and understanding people. Keep talking until you have exhausted your capacity to talk. Doing so will help you reconnect with the world outside of you. Or if you can't talk it out, write it out! Or paint it out! Or sing it out! And give yourself permission to cry—as often and as much as you need to. Tears can help you cleanse your body, mind, and spirit. While depression is normal and natural in grief, it's also important to be aware of the possibility of clinical depression. If your sadness isn't softening over time, if you can't function in our daily life, if you feel a pervasive sense of worthlessness and hopelessness, you may have clinical depression on top of your grief. Please see your physician or therapist right away. Medication and/or therapy may give you just the support you need right now to get unstuck so that you can move toward healing.



Shock & Denial

Remember that your feelings of shock and numbness are normal, even necessary. They are helping you survive right now. And they will naturally fade over time. In the meantime, be gentle with yourself. Be self-compassionate. Let other people take care of you. Accept any support you are offered.



Anxiety & Fear

It's normal to feel anxious and afraid after the death of a significant person in your life. It's normal to worry, "Am I going to survive this? Will someone else die too? How will everything get taken care of? How can I possibly ever be happy again?" Under no circumstances should you allow your natural fears and anxieties to go unexpressed. If you don't talk about them, you may find yourself retreating from other people and the world in general. Many grieving people become prisoners in their own minds and hearts. They repress their anxiety, panic, and fear, only to discover that these feelings are now repressing them. If you are having true panic attacks, please see your physician or therapist right away. You will not be able to move toward healing if fear is controlling your life.

Disorganization

This feeling can be scary. You may feel like you're in the middle of a wild, rushing river, where you can't get a grasp on anything. Disconnected thoughts may race through your mind, and your strong, random feelings may be overwhelming. You might also feel as if you can't function in your daily life. Even bathing, dressing, and feeding yourself may feel like too much to handle right now. Find someone to share your confusing thoughts and feelings with. As you talk, you might think you're not making much sense—and you may not be. But talking it out can still be clarifying. Say no to any unnecessary commitments for now. Make written lists of must-do tasks. Also, avoid making any critical decisions when you're feeling this way. Go slowly and be patient with yourself.



Guilt & Regret

Guilt and regret are common in grief. Talk to others about them, but don't allow others to explain your feelings away. If your listeners instantly dismiss your feelings of guilt, telling you that you did nothing wrong, they aren't bearing witness to what feels true or needs exploring inside of you. As you express yourself, remember—you aren't perfect. No one is. At times, you will naturally go back and review if you could have said or done something differently. Allow yourself this review time, but as you do so, be compassionate with yourself. Continue to remind yourself that there are often things in life that cannot be changed.

Relief

In some cases, it's quite normal and understandable to feel a sense of relief or release after a death. But even so, these feelings can then lead to what I call relief-guilt. If you feel guilty or ambivalent about your sense of relief, write about it or talk it out. Find someone you trust to listen and hear you.



Anger

In grief, experiencing explosive emotions such as anger, hate, blame, terror, resentment, rage, and jealousy is normal. Beneath them are usually feelings of pain, helplessness, frustration, fear, and hurt. You have two avenues for dealing with your anger—outward or inward. The outward avenue leads to healing; the inward avenue does not. Keeping explosive emotions inside leads to low self-esteem, depression, guilt, physical complaints, and sometimes even persistent thoughts of suicide. Find ways to express them outside of yourself that do not harm you or anyone else. Turn to a nonjudgmental listener. Try physical activities that allow you to channel or calm your feelings, such as long walks, running, martial arts, golf, racquet sports, or yoga.

