



# What is grief?

Grief occurs in response to the loss of someone or something. The loss may involve a loved one, a job, or possibly a role (student entering the workplace or employee entering retirement). Anyone can experience grief and loss; however, individuals are unique in how they experience this event. ***Grief, itself, is a normal and natural response to loss.*** It is important to acknowledge and allow the grief to happen because it promotes the healing process. Grief can impact your body, thoughts, and emotions. Although each person can have very different experiences of grief, some common reactions are:

Body	Thoughts	Emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Pit in the stomach</li> <li>●Nausea</li> <li>●Tightness in the chest</li> <li>●Tightness in the throat</li> <li>●Oversensitivity to noise</li> <li>●A surreal feeling</li> <li>●Breathlessness</li> <li>●Muscle weakness</li> <li>●Lack of energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Disbelief (it can't be true)</li> <li>● Confusion (trouble keeping thoughts straight)</li> <li>● Preoccupation (think very often about him)</li> <li>● Sense of presence (seems like he is still here)</li> <li>● Thinking you see or hear the him</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Guilt and self-blame</li> <li>●Anxiety/Fear</li> <li>●Anger</li> <li>●Loneliness</li> <li>●Fatigue</li> <li>●Helplessness</li> <li>●Shock</li> <li>●Yearning for the lost person</li> <li>●Numbness</li> </ul>

These grief reactions may contribute to crying, trouble sleeping, a change in appetite, absent-mindedness, social withdrawal, dreams and nightmares, avoiding reminders, and trying to stay busy. Expect that you will have ups and downs from day to day.

## When grief doesn't go away

It's normal to feel sad, numb, or angry following a loss. But as time passes, these emotions should become less intense as you accept the loss and start to move forward. If you aren't feeling better over time, or your grief is getting worse, it may be a sign that your grief has developed into a more serious problem, such as complicated grief or major depression.

## When to seek professional help for grief

Contact the Center for Counseling and Student Wellness or another professional counselor if you:

- Feel like life isn't worth living
- Wish you had died with your loved one
- Blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it
- Feel numb and disconnected from others for more than a few weeks
- Are having difficulty trusting others since your loss
- Are unable to perform your normal daily activities

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### The Center for Counseling and Student Wellness

*Free, confidential counseling services for students*

91 St. Clair Street, 315-781-3388

Appointments 9 am to 5 pm, M-F

For more information, visit our website at [www.hws.edu/studentlife/counseling.aspx](http://www.hws.edu/studentlife/counseling.aspx)

## Coping with grief and loss tip 1: Get support

The single most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. Even if you aren't comfortable talking about your feelings under normal circumstances, it's important to express them when you're grieving. Sharing your loss makes the burden of grief easier to carry. Wherever the support comes from, accept it and **do not grieve alone**. Connecting to others will help you heal.

- **Turn to friends and family members** – Now is the time to lean on the people who care about you, even if you take pride in being strong and self-sufficient. Draw loved ones close, rather than avoiding them, and accept the assistance that's offered. Oftentimes, people want to help but don't know how, so tell them what you need.
- **Draw comfort from your faith** – If you follow a religious tradition, embrace the comfort its mourning rituals can provide. Spiritual activities that are meaningful to you – such as praying, meditating, or going to church – can offer solace. If you're questioning your faith in the wake of the loss, talk to a clergy member or others in your religious community.
- **Talk to a counselor** – If your grief feels like too much to bear even with the support of others, call the Center for Counseling and Student Wellness or another professional counselor. An experienced counselor can help you work through intense emotions and overcome obstacles to your grieving.

## Coping with grief and loss tip 2: Take care of yourself

When you're grieving, it's so important to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete you. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

- **Face your feelings.** You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.
- **Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.** Write about your loss in a journal. If you've lost a loved one, write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organization that was important to him or her.
- **Look after your physical health.** The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially.
- **Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either.** Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.
- **Plan ahead for grief "triggers".** Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. If you're sharing a holiday or lifecycle event with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on strategies to honor the person you loved.

## Supportive Campus Resources

- The Center for Counseling and Student Wellness: 781-3388
- Hobart Deans Office: 781-3300
- William Smith Deans Office: 781-3467
- The Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Programs: 781-3478
- HWS Chaplain's Office: 781-3671

Adapted from:

Worden, J.W., *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, Second Edition, Spring Publishing Co., NY, 1991. and [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grief\\_loss.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss.htm)