

5.7.5 The Grief Experience

Because grief can be so painful and seem overwhelming, it frightens us. Many people worry if they are grieving in the “right” way and wonder if the feelings they have are normal. Instead of judging, it is more helpful to be patient and accept that every person’s grief, including our own, is different.

Most people who suffer a loss experience one or more of the following:

Physical Responses

- Tightness in the throat or heaviness in the chest. If these feelings persist, you should talk with your physician
- An empty feeling in one’s stomach
- A gain or loss of appetite or pleasure
- Difficulty sleeping (may have nightmares)
- Over-sensitivity to noise
- A sense of depersonalization
- Breathlessness/sighing
- Nervousness, tension, agitation, irritability
- Dizziness
- Lack of energy, initiative, motivation
- Dry mouth
- Decreased or increased sexual desire
- Heart palpitations, trembling, hot flashes and other indications of anxiety

Emotional Responses

- Restlessness and difficulty concentrating
- Feeling that the loss isn’t real, that it didn’t actually happen
- Sensing the person’s presence, hearing their voice, seeing their face or expecting them to walk in the door at the usual time
- Forgetting and not finishing things you have started to do
- Preoccupation with the life of the deceased person
- Feelings of guilt or anger over things that happened or didn’t happen in the relationship
- Mood swings over the slightest things
- Crying at unexpected times, feelings of sadness
- Feelings of anxiety over one’s future or questions regarding one’s own death
- Loneliness (emotional or social)
- Fatigue
- Shock
- Yearning, searching
- Relief
- Numbness (overwhelmed with so many feelings)



Interpersonal Responses

- Feeling as though you need to take care of other people who seem uncomfortable and who refrain from talking about your own feelings of loss
- Needing to tell and re-tell and remember things about the lost relationship
- Social withdrawal or loss of interest in the outside world
- Avoiding reminders of the deceased

If your experiences become overwhelming and cause you concern, do not hesitate to contact a support person such as:

- Your physician
- A clergy person
- A mental health professional
- A trusted friend or family member

Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it.

– Helen Keller

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Record of Updates

Version Number	Date of Effect	Summary of Revisions
1	8/24/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original version posted.

