

GRIEF AND LOSS

WHAT IS LOSS?

Loss is when a person no longer has someone or something in their life, or they have less of something. Many every day losses do not have a long-term emotional impact—like losing your grocery list on the way to the store. Losses that involve someone significant leaving or something of importance being taken away can have a devastating physical, emotional, mental and spiritual impact. Loss can take many forms such as:

- Death of family member, unborn child, friend, pet.
- Death of someone who made an impact like a teacher, community member, neighbor or famous person that you never met.
- Loss of a relationship, identity, home, job, financial security, expectations, ability to do something, feeling physically or emotionally safe, good health.
- Loss of a way of life (which happened for many as a result of COVID) or routine

WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is a natural physical, emotional and behavioral reaction to experiences of deep loss. Everyone expresses grief differently. How grief is expressed can be affected by things like someone's age, their relationship with who or what was lost, spiritual beliefs, gender, culture or ethnicity.

According to the [Dougy Center](#)...

Common responses young children have when they grieve include...

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General anxiety • Crying • Clinginess • Irritability • Repetitive questions • Behavior regression | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in sleeping and eating habits • Concerns about safety and abandonment • Short periods of strong reaction, mixed with no reaction • Nightmares and intrusive thoughts • Stomachaches, headaches, body pain |
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Older children may also experience...

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of rage, revenge, guilt, sadness, regret, relief and worry • Concern for safety of self and others • Worry about something bad happening again | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty concentrating and focusing • Increased sensitivity to noise, light, movement and change • Withdrawal from others |
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Teenagers may also...

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase risk taking • Have unpredictable and intense emotional reactions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel uncomfortable discussing their loss with parents and caregivers • Be confused over their role in the family |
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STIGMA VERSUS REALITY

Many assumptions are made about people who are grieving that result in them feeling isolated, alone, judged and misunderstood. Often people do not know what to say, feel uncomfortable discussing loss, fear saying something wrong or think talking to a person who is grieving about their loss will be upsetting to that person, so they avoid talking about the loss, or stop seeing the grieving person altogether.

People think that grief should look a certain way or have a timeline, or that people who are grieving go through the stages of grief in a straight line, so they grow impatient with how the person is expressing their grief and how long it is taking. People think they can cheer a person up by listing ways the situation could be worse, or that sharing their own experiences with grief will give the person who is grieving hope. People do not want to intrude on the person who is grieving, so they wait for the person who is grieving to reach out to them to say what they need, when they are ready.

A person's grief and pain are caused by their loss, not by talking about it. Grief has no timeline. There is no right or wrong way to do it. Grief is not a problem that needs to be fixed. It is an experience that people live. What a person who is grieving needs is for people to show up, stick around, act normal, not offer advice or make it about themselves, not judge how people express their grief or how long it takes, offer specific ways to help and then follow through, and listen.

LEARN MORE

[Dougy Center](#)

[National Alliance for Children's Grief](#)

[Whatsyourgrief.com](#)

