

I Am Grieving

You can connect with a counselor at [Chat with a Counselor](#) to talk more about the grief you may be feeling.



Introduction: What is Grief?

Grief is your natural response to loss. Grief isn't something you choose to experience; it just happens. Everyone's grief looks different. You and someone else in your family may experience the same loss, but chances are you'll grieve differently. And you will grieve differently from one day to the next or from one minute to the next.



What Kind of Losses Cause Grief?

Grief is a response to loss. That might mean a loss of a loved one through death. But it might also mean losing your health, your physical ability, your job, or a beloved pet. Loss could mean divorce, miscarriage, infertility, moving, or being deployed. Loss happens in the context of sad events, such a death or a separation, but it also happens in the context of happy life events. For instance, new parents experience many losses while also rejoicing in the birth of their child: loss of freedoms, loss adult conversation, or loss of the life they had as a couple. Feeling that loss does not mean you are depressed or secretly unhappy. It just means that life is sometimes complicated, and some experiences are both happy and sad.



What Does Grief Feel Like?

Grief can feel like sadness. It can also feel like a zillion other things: anger, betrayal, loneliness, fear. You might feel grief as emotions. You might cry and know that you are sad. You might also feel grief physically. You might feel a knot in your stomach. Your heart might race. You might feel tired or have a headache. You might feel everything all at once, and feel mad/sad/crazy and just want to scream. You may feel like you're just drowning and overwhelmed. Or you might feel...nothing. You might just feel ... Sometimes grief just feels numb.



People Keep Telling Me to Let It Out

Well-meaning people will say lots of unhelpful things to you when you're grieving. There is no right way to grieve. Many people cry, some scream, some stomp their feet. But other people sit quietly. Others run. They draw, paint, and write poetry. They sculpt. They hug a close friend. They want to be alone. You may want to talk. You may not want to talk. You may want to talk one minute and then change your mind. That's ok. You may have no idea what you need. In that case, talking to a counselor might be helpful. Counselors can hear where you are, and may hear things you can't; they may be able to help you develop strategies that work for you.



So When Do I Get Better

The loss that caused you to grieve probably isn't going to go away. Likewise, your grief isn't something that's just going to go away. It's not something wrong with you that needs to get fixed. But it will change, over time. The intense crazy feeling won't last forever. You may find it helpful to journal or talk with a counselor periodically so that you can reflect on the ways you have changed, and the ways your grief has changed. These changes are normal, and not feeling overwhelmed does not mean you have stopped grieving, nor stopped loving the person you lost. It only means that you are adjusting to a new normal – to a world that has been forever changed.



It's Complicated

Grieving a loss is never easy, but sometimes, it's just...complicated. It might be complicated because your relationship to the person who died was complicated – maybe you have fond memories from your childhood but more recent painful memories both of which are now swimming around in your head. Maybe there were things unsaid between you, or things you wish could be unsaid. Maybe the loss itself was particularly traumatic, sudden, or complicated. Maybe this loss is just one in a string of tragedies threatening to overwhelm you. There are a million reasons why this could be a complicated experience for you, and none of them mean there's anything wrong with you. But now, more than ever, might be a good time to connect with a counselors. When life gets complicated, you deserve to have a team of folks around you, helping you navigate it all.



Grief That Has No Voice

When you grieve, you will undoubtedly also mourn. Mourning is the action – all the ways in which we give voice to our grief. And we learn how to mourn by those around us – our families, our faith communities, our ethnic groups. This means emotive expressions like crying and wailing, for some. But it also means public acts like attending funerals, making shiva calls, visiting cemeteries, hanging black drapes, or wearing black clothes. Participating in mourning rituals does not make your grief go away, but it does give it a voice. It gives it a name, and a place in the world. Sometimes, though, your grief doesn't have a voice. The word for this is disenfranchisement.

Unacknowledged Losses

Your grief may have no voice because your loss isn't acknowledged. Often, the experience of pregnancy loss is one of unacknowledged and disenfranchised grief. Your faith community may not extend the rituals of mourning (funerals, etc.) to a pregnancy loss. You might not get bereavement time off from work, and your coworkers might not even have known of the pregnancy, let alone the loss. Yet your loss is no less real. Others may find the loss of a pet to fall into this unacknowledged category. Sometimes, the loss of physical health or ability is also unacknowledged, as those around you assume you are (or should be) grateful to be alive, or for what health you do have.

Unacknowledged Relationships

When someone dies, your grief may be unacknowledged and disenfranchised if your relationship to the person is unacknowledged, or not accepted by others, and you are therefore excluded from rituals of mourning. Perhaps you do not feel comfortable attending the funeral of your ex-sister-in-law. You nonetheless grieve at her death. As mourning rituals often center around biological families, if you are not within that group, you may find yourself excluded – intentionally or unintentionally. You may grieve the loss of a neighbor, nursing home roommate, coworker, or lover, but find yourself isolated in your grief. Likewise, gay or lesbian partners often find their grief goes unacknowledged if they are not out to friends or coworkers, and may be excluded from mourning rituals entirely if their partner was not out to their family.

Taboo

Or perhaps the situation is complicated in such a way that you don't feel comfortable sharing it with others. For some, a loss to suicide carries a stigma of judgment. Those who grieve, then, may not be able to discuss their feelings for fear of judgment by their community. The same may be true for losses that happen in the context of overdoses, crimes, or any number of other socially unacceptable circumstances. Your grief and loss is then compounded by your inability to receive support from your community.

You, Yourself, are Disenfranchised

Finally, you may not be able to give voice to your grief because you yourself are not given a voice. In some cases, this means that circumstances prevent you from attending funerals or other rituals. You might be deployed, hospitalized, incarcerated, or simply unable to get out of work. In other cases, it is because others do not realize you are grieving. Attention often focuses on the most obvious grievers, and may overlook grandparents, children, those with developmental disabilities, or those whose grief simply looks different from everyone else's. Do you hear your own situation here? If so, the next step is simple: if you are grieving and feel disenfranchised, it's time to call a counselor who will not judge you, your grief, your relationship, your loss, or the circumstances of it. They will hear your grief and help you consider ways to give it a voice.

You can connect with a counselor at [Chat with a Counselor](https://soulcareproject.org/help-guides/grief-loss.html).
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