



# Grief

## What is Grief?

Feelings of sadness can be produced through the loss of a loved one through death, the breakup of a significant relationship, the loss of a job or a dream, illness, or even graduating from school. Grief is a natural response but can be expressed differently from person to person. Grief is often thought of as including five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.<sup>1</sup> These help us understand what we may be experiencing and are not meant to communicate that grief “should” be experienced in a linear, stage-like format. In fact, sometimes, people re-experience stages or bypass stages; there is as much individual difference in grief as there are people. There is no recommended time for grieving a loss, however, prolonged feelings of grief can be unhealthy and impede upon other aspects of life.

## Grief can become a problem if you are experiencing the following:<sup>2</sup>

- Feelings of pain or numbness do not decrease, at least 6 months or a year after a loss
- Being preoccupied with the loss - wishing for the return of a lost loved one or to the way things were
- Becoming bitter or full of rage
- Difficulty with recognizing that a loss has occurred (e.g. suppressing thoughts, avoiding reminders of the loss)
- Depression, especially feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of apathy (i.e. not caring anymore or wanting to give up)
- Problems arising in other significant relationships (e.g. withdrawing from loved ones)
- Intrusive, distressing thoughts about the loss
- Loss of purpose or meaning in life
- Increased irritability or agitation

## Consequences of Grief

People express their grief in different ways, influenced by both cultural and personal factors. Nevertheless, there are some common ways in which people express grief, which include:<sup>3</sup>

<b>Social</b>	<b>Personal</b>	<b>Situational</b>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to or actual withdrawal from others</li> <li>• Acting impulsively or taking uncharacteristic risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mood changes: depression, frustration, anger (at self, God, etc.)</li> <li>• Feelings of guilt, remorse, anxiety or fear</li> <li>• Loss of identity</li> <li>• Physical changes: lack appetite, difficulty sleeping, headaches</li> <li>• Cognitive changes: difficulty concentrating, lack motivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased work productivity</li> </ul>
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## How to Help Friends and Family Struggling with Grief<sup>4</sup>

- **Understand** that grief is different for everyone even though their response may seem disproportionate to you.
- **Include** your friend in what you're doing. Help them to stay connected with people.
- Be a **good listener**. Let your friend talk about the loss. Allow them to be honest with what they're thinking and experiencing. **Ask** about the loss and how they're feeling. Acknowledge their grief.
- **Be present** with them, whether they simply need you to sit with them or they need you to be a listening ear.
- **Do not minimize** their grief. It may seem helpful to encourage our friends "get over it;" however, this forces our friends to contain their grief. Be a safe place for them to come.
- Be **patient**, it can seem like a "long time" but people need time and space to grieve.
- **Help them practically**. Instead of asking what they need, it may be more helpful to take initiative and cook a meal or help them with something around the house.
- **Take care of yourself**. Maintain your own health and wellness so that you can journey with your friend.
- If your friend is showing signs of intense grief (see above), encourage them to **seek professional help**.

## What does the Bible say about Grief?

Grief is a normal response to loss. We can get frustrated with our grief or the grief of others, sometimes becoming impatient with the process. However, the Bible provides us with encouragement. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4), promising relief from our pain. While God can feel far away in our times of sorrow, God has assured us that we are not left alone in our distress, that "the Lord is close to the brokenhearted" (Psalm 34:18). In fact, we are told that no matter what our losses or our challenges, nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-9). Grief

can appear isolating and never-ending, but there is hope. God comforts those who are grieving and his love for us remains the same.

## Treatment

There are many different ways to approach and treat grief:

- Cognitive-behavioural therapy: helping clients re-engage with life, returning to activities they have been avoiding in their life because of distressing memories.<sup>5</sup>
- Regret resolution: revisiting past hurts or painful memories and bringing forgiveness and resolving guilt, anger and other unresolved feelings.<sup>6</sup>
- Constructivist approaches: processing grief through meaning-making and helping clients integrate the story of their loss into their personal narratives; this can be done through retelling the narrative, metaphor, etc.<sup>7</sup>

**For more information or counselling support, please contact:**

### **Christian Counselling Services**

<http://www.saskatoonccs.com/>

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<sup>1</sup> Kübler-Ross, E. & Kessler, D. (2005). *On Grief and Grieving*. Scribner: Toronto.

<sup>2</sup> Sherwood, Glynis. Chronic 'Stuck' Grief: 10 Warning Signs & 5 Vital Healing Strategies

<sup>3</sup> Lifeline Information Service. (2010) Toolkit: Coping with sorrow, loss and grief.

<sup>4</sup> Lifeline Information Service. (2010) Toolkit: Coping with sorrow, loss and grief.

<sup>5</sup> Sexton, L. (2015). "Psychology works" fact sheet: Grief in adults. *Canadian Psychological Association*.

<sup>6</sup> Sexton, L. (2015). "Psychology works" fact sheet: Grief in adults. *Canadian Psychological Association*.

<sup>7</sup> Neimeyer, R. A., Burke, L. A., Mackay, M. M., & van Dyke Stringer, J. G. (2010). Grief therapy and the reconstruction of meaning: From principles to practice. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 40, 73-83. Doi: 10.1007/s10879-009-9135-3