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Information & Support

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## LOSS

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How does the process of grieving work?

Grieving is a natural reaction to loss – not only death. The pain of loss can be very overwhelming. All sorts of emotions emerge, such as shock, anger, sadness, disbelief or guilt. It is normal to be sad after losing a loved one, a job, a pet.... However, the most important thing is not to be overwhelmed in a way that delays the healing process.

5 stages of grief

A Swiss-American psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross described the five most common human emotional reactions after the loss of a loved one:

**Denial.** It is the first reaction to loss for many people. It is a natural state for a sudden, unexpected change in the status quo.

**Anger.** At this stage you may feel angry about what has happened, think it is unfair that it has happened to you because you don't deserve it. You may also feel guilty or look for someone to blame, trying to make sense of what has happened.

**Bargaining.** This is the stage when you beg the universe to restore the status quo. You can think of many 'if only' and 'what if' scenarios, hoping that there is still a way to turn things around. In a sense you are trying to regain control of the situation.

**Depression.** You begin to face reality and, although you do not yet fully accept it, you begin to acknowledge what has happened. At this point, hope of reversing the situation can already be lost, resulting in great sadness and a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, leading to depression.

**Acceptance.** The final stage of grief is accepting the truth of what has happened. This does not mean that you are reconciled to it, but at this stage you can be ready to start healing from your pain and sorrow.

In summary, grieving is a natural process after losing someone or something that was important to us. Children and teenagers experience it after losing a pet, a first love, after moving to a new place. Grief can also occur after the loss of an image of a certain person, for example, someone who very much wants to have grandchildren may feel a severe loss when their child comes out as homosexual or turns out to be infertile.



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**How do our brains cope with loss? You will find the answer to this question in the book „Before and After Loss” by Dr Lisa M. Shulman – a prominent neurobiologist who has had to face loss herself.**

#### How can we cope with bereavement?

Grief is a very personal process. Although many people go through the [5 stages](#), they may go through them at different paces, in different orders or there may be completely different reactions.

#### To make the grieving process easier:

- **Talk to your loved ones.** Having a circle of support can help you through talks about emotions or reminiscing. Sharing stories or simply receiving support during this difficult time can bring relief.
- **Join a support group.** There are many support groups for bereaved people. It doesn't matter if we are mourning a specific relative or mourning in general. Support from others who are in the same situation as you can be very valuable.
- **Seek help from a psychology expert.** If you feel you cannot cope with your bereavement, it may be time to seek help from a professional. Seek help when:
  - You feel overwhelmed and want to talk to a specialist. There are no rules about when to seek help. If you feel you need it, just reach for it.
  - You are finding it difficult to cope with domestic and professional duties, and you are expected to start functioning normally after a while. You don't have the energy or desire to do what you need to do while others rely on you.
  - You don't look after yourself properly, you don't eat or sleep or you engage in self-destructive behaviour.
  - You are angry, aggressive or have suicidal thoughts.
  - You are depressed.

#### How to help a bereaved person

What if it is your loved one who is in grief? How can you help someone cope better during this time? You can:

- **Be there for them** – listen and let people talk, cry, share stories and frustrations. Sympathise. This may be enough.
- **Offer support** – perhaps your loved one needs help with funeral arrangements, errands, transport, cooking or childcare. If you are in a position to help them, offer to do so.
- **Distract** – if appropriate, help your loved one to detach from the grieving process for a while. Let them choose an activity or suggest something suitable, but don't push.
- **Suggest therapy** – if you feel you cannot help them and the loved one is not coping very well. Look for a therapist or a support group, take the person to a meeting, if possible.

In summary, there are many resources that can help you or your loved one during this difficult time. And remember, one day even grief will pass.

*Don't wait, call now! If you are not coping with your bereavement, contact a specialist.  
We are here to support you!*