Ask The Expert

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Topic: Grief

What does grief look like?

Grief is a profound emotional response to loss. It encompasses a range of feelings, thoughts, and physical sensations that arise when we experience the absence of something or someone significant. While we often associate grief with the death of a loved one, it extends beyond mortality. Grief can emerge from various life transitions, unmet expectations, and missed opportunities. It involves sadness, longing, anger, confusion, and even moments of acceptance.

Ultimately, grief reflects our capacity to feel deeply and process the impact of change or absence in our lives. Grief is a deeply personal experience, and its manifestations can vary widely.

Some common signs include:

Emotional Responses

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt
- Anxiety
- Shock

Physical Symptoms

- Fatigue
- Changes in appetite
- Sleep disturbances
- Aches and pains

Cognitive Effects

- Difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Confusion

Social Impact

- Withdrawal from others
- Strained relationships
- Difficulty engaging in social activities

Different Types of Grief

Grief is not a one-size-fits-all experience. It can result from various losses, including:

- Death of a Loved One
- Divorce or Relationship Breakup
- Job Loss
- Health Diagnosis
- Loss of a Pet
- Miscarriage or Infertility

Abrupt Grief

This common form occurs when sudden or unexpected loss strikes–whether it's the loss of a job, the end of a relationship, or any other unforeseen change. When faced with abrupt grief, allow yourself to experience the emotions, step away if needed, and seek immediate support from trusted friends or family.

Prolonged Grief

Lasting long-term, this grief can significantly interfere with daily life. When it reaches a level where it impairs essential functions, it may be diagnosed as prolonged grief disorder. Symptoms include intense longing and preoccupation with thoughts or memories of the loss. Seek professional guidance for managing prolonged grief.

Absent Grief

Surprisingly, the absence of grief is also a form of grief. When shock, denial, or dissociation numbs your ability to grieve after a devastating loss, you experience absent grief.

Delayed Grief

Sometimes grief emerges later, catching us off guard. It might take weeks, months, or even years for the full impact of loss to sink in.

Disenfranchised Grief

Certain losses such as the death of a pet, a miscarriage, or a stigmatized relationship may not receive recognition or validation from others. Disenfranchised grief occurs when your mourning is disregarded or minimized.

Collective Grief

When a community experiences loss, such as a natural disaster, a tragedy, or a shared trauma, the collective grief affects everyone. Recognize the power of communal support during such times.

Secondary Loss Grief

This type of grief results from additional losses triggered by the primary loss. For example, losing a loved one may lead to secondary losses like financial instability or changes in social connections.

Negative Impact on Mental Health

Grief can exacerbate mental health challenges, leading to:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Isolation
- Increased Stress Levels

Strategies to Cope with Grief

Grief can exacerbate mental health challenges, leading to:

Acknowledge & Express Emotion

- Give yourself permission to feel and express a range of emotions.
- Consider journaling, art, or talking to a trusted friend or professional.

Create New Traditions

Modify or establish holiday traditions that honor the memory of your loved one or acknowledge the change.

Self-Care

Prioritize self-care activities, including exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate sleep.

Seek Support

Connect with support groups or counseling services to share your experience with others who understand.

Set Boundaries

Communicate your needs and establish boundaries to protect your well-being.

Resources for Support

Grief Support Organizations

Grief Share >

Compassionate Friends >

Open to Hope >

The Center for Prolonged Grief >

Grief in Common >

Professional Assistance

Reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for confidential counseling services.

Psychology Today >

BetterHelp >

Talkspace >

Books on Grief

It's Okay to Not Be Okay >
By Megan Devine

When Breath Becomes Air >
By Paul Kalanithi

The Grief Recovery Handbook >
By John W. James & Russell Friedman

Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy >
By Sheryl Sandberg & Adam Grant

A Grief Observed >
By C.S. Lewis

Grieving Mindfully >
By Sameet M. Kumar

The Year of Magical Thinking >
By Joan Didion