

## COPING WITH GRIEF

Grief is a normal, healthy response to loss. It is not an illness, nor is it something to be “fixed” or “cured”; we grieve because we have loved. There is no easy way around the grieving process, as the pain of loss must be acknowledged before it can be reconciled.

### Navigating Loss

Each person grieves in their own way. Similarly, there is no “right way” to grieve. Each person has their own style of grieving, and what works for one person may not work for others. The key is to find what works for you. Here are some helpful things to keep in mind:

1. **Allow yourself an opportunity to grieve** – Regardless of the circumstances of death, fully acknowledging the loss may take days, weeks, months, or even years. Avoid coping strategies that promote numbing your emotions, such as alcohol or overeating.
2. **“Dose” yourself accordingly** – As you grieve, be intentional about moving towards the pain by allowing yourself time to cry or reminisce. Similarly, carve out time for practical needs and tasks of daily life that can give you somewhat of a break from your grief.
3. **Take care of yourself** – This can sometimes be difficult for caregivers after losing the person they’ve cared for. Focus on the practical things of everyday living rather than allowing yourself to get overwhelmed by tasks. Drink water. Prioritize sleep. Focus on movement (like walking, not necessarily vigorous exercise).
4. **Find a Support System** – In the days and weeks following the death of a loved one, you may find yourself surrounded, or even overwhelmed, with people offering their help. But, as time goes on, outside support tends to dwindle. Finding connection and care from a grief support group often provides the comfort you desire, as well as a safe place to tell your story.
5. **Create a New Normal** – Losing someone close to you changes your life. Remember that “getting back to a normal routine” may not be the most helpful intention. As you mourn your loved one, consider that you may need to construct a new piece of your identity to incorporate your loss. For some this may look like exploring new interests and making new friends.

### Characteristics of Grief

The following examples are common, **normal** responses to loss:

- Feelings of numbness, shock, denial, or disbelief
- Intense sadness, crying, fear, anger, or feelings of guilt and regret
- Inability to concentrate, “brain fog”, forgetfulness
- Fatigue, nausea, sleeplessness, aches and pains, weight loss or weight gain

**Moving “Forward” versus “Moving” On** – Remember that there is no timeline for grief; it is a personal experience for each individual. Much like a scar heals, the wound of grief will lessen and fade over time; but it will remain a part of you. As you move forward and process your loss, a new life without your loved one is able to grow around the sadness that you now feel. This, by no means, means that you are forgetting your loved one; on the contrary, it is an indication that they will always be a part of you.