

# WELL BALANCED

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## Grief AWARENESS



Grief is a natural emotional response to loss. It can stem from many experiences, including the death of a loved one, divorce, the loss of a pet, job changes, pregnancy loss, retirement, medical diagnosis, or financial setback, to name a few. Grief is a normal part of life, and the grieving experience is unique to each individual. It often comes in waves, impacting people physically, emotionally, spiritually, and behaviorally.

The stages of grief include:

- Denial
- Depression
- Anger
- Acceptance.
- Bargaining

Some people move through all stages of grief, while others may not experience any of them. Grief is not a linear process, and the stages do not follow a set order. For those who do experience them, it's common to move back and forth between stages and feel them at varying intensities. Loss can be all-consuming, and there is no specific time limit for healing.

Although grief is an emotional response, its influence goes beyond just that. Here's how:

- **Physical Health:** The intensity of grief can flood the body with aches and pains. Many people also experience symptoms such as fatigue, nausea, and dramatic changes in sleep patterns. Significant changes in weight—extreme weight loss or gain—are also common among those struggling with grief.
- **Behavioral Health:** Grief is often unexpected and difficult to explain, which can lead to uncharacteristic behaviors. Grieving may cause forgetfulness, confusion, difficulty thinking clearly, trouble

concentrating, and problems making decisions. People might become preoccupied or withdrawn, even from the activities and relationships they cherish most.

- **Spiritual Health:** For many, grief can bring up difficult questions that people long to answer. Looking for someone or something to blame, spirituality may be a source of clarity, comfort, or confusion. Some may feel a deeper connection to their beliefs, while others may begin to question what they once held to be true.
- **Emotional Health:** Grief can lead to a complex emotional journey. As individuals learn to navigate the reality of their loss, they may feel periods of anger, irritability, guilt, depression, anxiety, or loneliness.

Although loss is an inevitable part of life, it is possible to cope in healthy ways and continue to live a meaningful, thriving life. Below are some strategies to practice self-care and nurture well-being.

- Honor emotions by processing them fully. It's important to feel emotions in a safe and healthy way. Unacknowledged grief can lead to bottled-up feelings and may contribute to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance misuse, abuse, and health issues.



MYTH

Grieving should last about a year.



FACT

There's no set limit for grief. Every individual experiences loss in their own way and at their own pace. Many report a peak in their grief symptoms during the six-month period, but this too can vary.

- Express grief through creativity by starting a journal, writing a letter, or making art. These outlets can provide space to process emotions and navigate the healing journey in a personal way.
- Prioritize physical health by getting enough sleep, making time for exercise, and eating nutritious food. Avoid turning to drugs and alcohol to cope. Maintaining a normal routine as much as possible can make an impact. When the body is cared for, the mind is more resilient and better able to overcome challenging times.
- Plan for grief-related triggers by anticipating them and understanding that an emotional response is normal. Important dates such as holidays, birthdays, or anniversaries can spark memories and bring challenging emotions to the surface. Consider planning time with supportive friends or family or engaging in a special activity to help navigate those moments with care.
- Seek help if coping alone becomes difficult. Support is available in many forms—whether through trusted family and friends, in-person or online counseling, therapy, grief support groups, or community resources. Leaning into support systems can help navigate challenging times and even preserve a sense of purpose when it feels hard to find.

If you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts, please contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting **988**—free, confidential support is available 24/7.



#### MYTH

It's best to do most of the talking when supporting someone who is grieving.



#### FACT

One of the most supportive things to do when someone is grieving is to listen. Grieving individuals often need space to talk through their feelings. Being present, offering a listening ear, and showing empathy can go far. In contrast, encouraging them to “be strong” or saying things like “at least you have...” may feel dismissive or cause additional emotional distress. True support is when listening occurs without discarding or minimizing feelings.

For help with substance use, reach out to the SAMHSA National Helpline at **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**. Support is free, confidential, and available any time.

#### Resources

- » National Grief Awareness Day ([betterhelp.com](https://www.betterhelp.com))

#### Sources

- » <https://www.samhsa.gov/blog/shining-light-bereavement-grief-samhsa-recognizes-national-grief-awareness-week>
- » <https://www.helpguide.org/mental-health/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss>
- » <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/caregiving/grief-and-loss>

