

## Recognizing and coping with sadness after a loss

### Aetna Resources For Living<sup>SM</sup>

It's hard to lose someone or something we care about. This is true even if we think we are prepared.

Feeling grief after a loss is something all people share. However, the types of losses that are mourned, ways to grieve, and the help wanted are different for each person.

Even though grief is unique for each of us, many of us have common feelings. Knowing a little more about what to expect and how to cope can be beneficial.



#### Losses we grieve

People grieve for many different things, including loss of a:

- Loved one, pet or beloved public figure
- Life role, such as a career or parenthood, as children move into adulthood
- Physical ability, such as hearing or seeing
- Relationship, marital status or partner after break-up
- Home, neighborhood, friends or phase of life when moving
- Plans for the future when life changes unexpectedly
- Possession, caused by a natural disaster or bankruptcy
- Belief — in a person, idea or cause

#### Stages of grief

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss psychiatrist, identified five stages of grief that people generally experience.

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

You may not experience each stage. Or, you may experience them in a different order.

#### Expressions of grief

Grief is personal. Everyone responds differently to loss. Some people show grief so it can be seen and felt by people around them. Others do not. It's important to never assume that something is wrong if you or someone you know doesn't outwardly mourn. It simply means the loss is being handled in a different way. You might experience reactions, such as:

**Physical:** stomachache or headache, pain around the heart area, insomnia, fatigue, dizziness, trembling, teeth grinding, panic attacks.

**Emotional:** shock, disbelief, numbness, anxiety, confusion, frustration, depression, guilt, loneliness, anger, detachment.

**Behavioral:** crying, pacing, staring, forgetting things, losing interest, losing focus, daydreaming, obsessing over the loss, worrying about one's own health.

**Spiritual:** anger at God or a higher power, losing faith, finding faith, becoming more thoughtful or philosophical.

Young children and teenagers may also respond by showing:

- Fear that they caused the situation
- Concern about their future
- Hostility
- Regression — behaving as they did at a younger age

## Providing support

You can support yourself or someone who is moving through the grief process.

- **Let emotions come and go.** Acknowledge a feeling, but avoid using it to define the whole self. For instance, say, “I feel sad right now” rather than “I am sad”
- **Write down feelings and thoughts daily**
- **Let people you trust, at work and home, know what happened**
- **Return to familiar routines when ready**
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Even if you’re not hungry, eating small, healthy meals throughout the day can boost energy and help even out your mood
- **Get some exercise.** This promotes sleep and reduces tension
- **Honor the anniversary or birthday** of a deceased loved one by:
  - Visiting the grave
  - Volunteering for a cause meaningful to you and that person
  - Planting a flower or tree
  - Visiting a favorite place of the loved one

## Seeking professional help

Sometimes grief can interfere with your ability to take care of yourself or your responsibilities. This is the time to reach out to a professional for help.

Please consider calling us or other mental health services if you are:

- Focusing on what you didn’t do or could have done
  - “I should have said I loved him”
  - “I should have saved more money”
- Having persistent unresolved feelings
- Experiencing more or stronger reactions over an extended period of time
- Feeling hopeless, helpless or suicidal
- Increasing your use of alcohol or drugs

Confidential access is available  
24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**1-888-AETNA-EAP (1-888-238-6232)**

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