



Coping with Grief and Loss

Bereavement and grief are individual, yet universal experiences that everyone faces within their lifetime. Everyone experiences loss in their own personal way. Many can navigate grief with the support of those who are already in their lives, but others may need more help. The type of support needed can vary depending on the nature and timing of the loss, the specific resources available, and other factors.



After experiencing a loss, it is normal for you and your family to experience:

- A sense of shock and disbelief.
- Feeling “lost”.
- Sadness, tearfulness, and depression. In fact, crying is a very normal reaction for everyone processing grief.
- Difficulty concentrating, confusion, trouble thinking clearly, completing tasks or making decisions.
- Repetitive and distressing thoughts about the loss.
- Sense of isolation and disconnection from others, even people you or your family are normally close to.
- Physical reactions, such as difficulty sleeping, changes in eating habits, muscle weakness and shakiness.

We encourage trying the following strategies to help you and your loved ones cope with loss:

- **Practice self-care.** Caring for yourself is very important. Even basic things, such as eating regularly, getting enough rest and engaging in physical activity, are critical. Maintain your usual daily routine as much as you are able to.
- **Give yourself time.** Do not try to “return to normal” right away. Give yourself time to process and accept the loss.
- **Reach out for support.** It is important to maintain emotional connections with your friends and family. Come together in-person or virtually to share memories and grieve. Seek support from friends, family, your faith/spiritual community, support groups, and your doctor or mental health professionals.
- **Explore healthy coping strategies.** Maintain comforting practices, such as prayer and meditation. Avoid alcohol or drugs. Most importantly, take time to remember what has been lost and reflect on special moments.

Helping a child cope with loss:

- **Be honest but age appropriate.** Remain calm and comforting. Answer their questions honestly using explanations that are right for the age of the child.
- **Let the child ask questions.** Encourage your child to ask questions. Offer realistic reassurance and share information that is right for their age. Help children find words for the emotions they are experiencing.
- **Maintain normal routines.** Maintain regular routines, such as mealtime, bedtime, school time and play time. This helps kids cope better with loss.
- **Be sensitive to any worries or fears.** Watch for signs of distress (sleeplessness, lack of appetite, disinterest in play, withdrawal or acting out). Invite the child to talk. Express love and reassurance. Don't be afraid to share your emotions together.
- If a child's distress is long-lasting, **ask for guidance** from your child's doctor, school counselor or a mental health professional.

Strategies to support someone who is grieving:

- **Reach out.** Stay connected to friends and loved ones by reaching out in person, over the phone or through social media and offer your support during this difficult time.
- **Engage in shared activities.** Doing an enjoyable activity together helps people remain connected to others. This also helps support healthy coping at a time when your loved one is grieving.
- **Offer specific help.** When offering help or support, it is more helpful to offer specific assistance, such as dropping off groceries, providing transportation, organizing belongings or updating others about the situation.

Grief is a natural and challenging part of life. However, if you continue to feel depressed, are unable to stop blaming yourself, or have difficulty functioning or coping – please seek help right away.

Support and help available to you and your loved ones through:

- LACDMH's 24/7 Help Line at **800-854-7771**
- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by calling/texting **988**
- SAMSA's Disasters Distress Helpline at **800-985-5990**

For more grief and loss resources, visit LACDMH's grief and loss resources webpage at dmh.lacounty.gov/grief-loss.