

## Coping with death: Help with grieving after loss

By Julia Haskins

**G**rief is something that we all go through at some point in our lives. It's not an easy thing to experience, especially when you're dealing with the death of someone who was close to you.

Grieving can take a heavy toll on your health and wellness. While there's no simple answer when it comes to dealing with grief, it's possible to go on with your life in a healthy way. Even if you feel like things will never look up, know that you can cope with the pain.

Grief can look like a lot of different emotions. Sadness is common, but you may also feel anger, confusion or shock. All of these emotions are completely normal. Grief affects everyone differently, and there's no right or wrong way to feel, as long as you're not harming yourself or others.

"The definition of grief is the way people perceive loss," says Bernard Davidson, PhD, MSW, associate professor of psychiatry and

health behavior at Augusta University Medical Center. "It's individual, it's personal, it's not one thing. It's going to look different for different folks."

People tend to talk a lot about emotions in connection with death, but physical health is also important to consider. Your body may react negatively to the stress of bereavement.

You could be hungrier than usual or not have much of an appetite at all.

You might be exhausted or have difficulty sleeping. Your body could also have a harder time bouncing back if you're already ill. Most of these symptoms are normal when grieving. But if you're concerned that something else is making you feel sick, see your doctor to be sure.

Talking about your loss can be a helpful part of grieving. It's hard to talk about someone who is no longer in your life, and this may bring up new emotions or make you cry. That's OK.

Reach out to people who can support you during this difficult time, whether you want to share memories, cry or talk about the pain you're going through. Family or friends who are also grieving may want to talk about what they're feeling, which can give you comfort.

If you don't want to talk to friends or family, consider seeking professional help. A counselor, social worker or psychologist can help you work through your feelings and discuss healthy coping skills with you. Or, you might prefer to join a support group with other people who are dealing with similar issues. Some people also seek out their religious or spiritual communities for help. No matter who you speak with, it's up to you how much you want to share and how you want to talk about your experience.

Remembering the people important to us who have



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died helps them stay in our lives.

"It's a sad time and the loss is obviously hard, but there's also a focus on remembering and honoring the positive things that the person has brought into the lives of others," Davidson says.

There are many ways to remember people you've lost. You can look at photographs and share them with friends or family who are also grieving. Or you could make a special place in your home for a memento that reminds you of your loved one. These don't have to be physical reminders either. You can keep a person's memory alive by celebrating happy events like birthdays and anniversaries.

When someone you care about has died, it may feel like you will never be able to experience joy again. Grieving will change your life, but it's important to practice self-care. You can do something as simple as going for a walk or spending time with other people.

It can be easy to fall into unhealthy habits during stressful times, but letting your health fall to the wayside will only make you feel worse. As much as possible, get some exercise, choose nutritious foods and get enough sleep, the American Psychological Association recommends. These small steps will go a long way toward helping you feel better physically and emotionally.

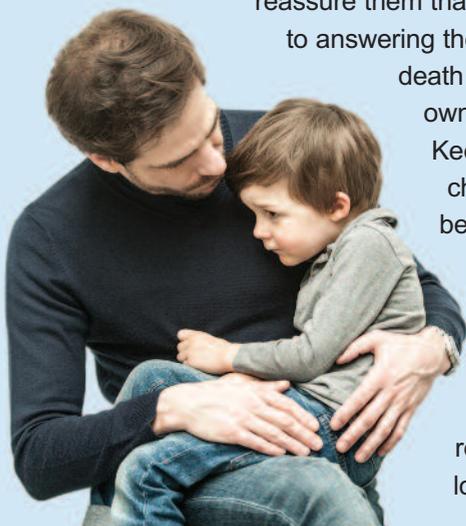
People in your life may mean well when encouraging you to move on with your life, but it's OK if you're not quite there yet. You may have heard that you're supposed to go through certain stages of grief. But as the American Psychological Association notes, there is no such thing as a normal timeline for feeling better. Grieving is a process, and you need to heal on your own terms. Be kind to yourself.

### Talking to your child about death

When a child is grieving, your first instinct may be to sidestep hard discussions about death. But you can adapt conversations that you would have with an adult to those that you have with your child. All children are affected by loss, no matter their age.

Let your child know that it's OK for them to be sad about losing someone and that they can show their feelings. Sometimes kids think that someone's death is their fault, so reassure them that is not true. Be open to answering their questions about death and sharing your own beliefs.

Keep an eye on kids for changes in mood or behavior. Some children may be reserved, while others may act out at home or at school. Give your child time to recover from their loss and cope.



Photos courtesy iStockphoto: Hands by Peopleimages; two women, Juannorino; father and child, Neyra