

GRIEF IS NORMAL:

How to Ease the Healing Process

Everyone Experiences Grief

Whether someone dies in a natural disaster, a car accident, or from a long-term illness, sooner or later each of us will experience the death of someone we care about and feel the deep pain that goes with it. Grief is a universal experience.

What to Expect

When the initial shock wears off, it's normal to feel increased pain, guilt, sadness, or anger. In fact, grief can mimic depression with changes in eating and sleeping patterns, and hopeless feelings. You may even worry that others will die or fear for your own safety.

As you move through grief, your "grief bursts" will become shorter and farther apart over time.

Normal Grief Reactions in Children

Children under age 5 lack the words to express grief. They don't understand the finality of death and may experience separation anxiety and nightmares. Infants may cry more often or become detached.

Children under age 12 may have a better understanding of death and have strong feelings about it, but may still need encouragement to express their feelings and grief.

Adolescents have an adult understanding of death. A death can impact all of their relationships, as well as school and home life. In order to fit in with peers, they may hide their grief. They also may experiment with dangerous behaviors like drugs, alcohol or reckless driving.

Ways to Help Kids Grieve

- Talk about death honestly and use the medical terms for the cause of death when you know them.
- Let kids choose whether or not to visit the hospital, go to the cemetery, or be involved in mourning rituals.
- Validate their feelings and help them maintain the relationship with the person who has died.

What You Can Do Right Now

- ❑ **Get support.** Allow people who care about you to help and comfort you. Ask them to share a wonderful memory, hold your hand, or do a simple chore you just aren't up to.
- ❑ **Respect your own process.** Everyone moves through grief on his or her own time line. If keeping a loved one's belongings brings you comfort, keep them. Set aside time to grieve. An appointment with grief can help you focus better at work or school.
- ❑ **Plan ahead for special days and events.** If you aren't sure if you want to attend that Thanksgiving dinner or New Year's Day party, explain that you won't know what you feel like until the day arrives. Ask a friend to be understanding if you cancel at the last minute.
- ❑ **Honor the person you miss.** Scatter petals at the beach, kiss a photo good night, or light a candle on an altar. Choose something that is meaningful to you.
- ❑ **Find the right therapist.** When you need help moving through grief, seek out a therapist who is warm, supportive, and experienced with grief. Use short telephone interviews to shop for a good fit with potential therapists. Ask about availability, fees, and how they would work with you.

Offering Extra Support

About Marriage and Family Therapists

Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are relationship experts. They work with individuals, couples, families, children, adolescents, and the elderly, providing support and perspective as patients struggle with life's challenges.

Licensed by the State of North Carolina, MFTs are psychotherapists who are uniquely trained and credentialed to assess, diagnose, and treat a wide range of issues so individuals achieve more adequate, satisfying, and productive relationships and social adjustment.

The North Carolina Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (NCAMFT) is an independent statewide non-profit organization made up of practicing marriage and family therapists. The goal of NCAMFT is to promote the profession of Marriage and Family Therapy in order to improve the health and well-being of families, couples and individuals.



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Seeking a Marriage and Family Therapist or other mental health professional to assist with life's difficulties is a sign of courage and a step in the right direction. Ask about E.J.'s special areas of expertise (i.e. anger management, divorce, relationship counseling, depression, grief, trauma).

If you are looking for extra support and guidance through a challenging situation or are just ready to move in a different direction in your relationships, I look forward to working with you to achieve your goals. Please call or email me for an individual, couples, or family therapy consultation today.

