

Coping With the Death of an Adult



Grieving a loss

Coping with the death of an adult, such as a spouse, parent, sibling, other family member or close friend, presents many challenges. When a person in your life dies, you are likely to experience intense grief and an array of physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions.

Everyone reacts differently to death and employs personal coping mechanisms for grief. Some people become frustrated and want to take action while others feel sad and want to withdraw. All grieving people, regardless of how they feel or respond to their loss, need the support of others. Research shows that most people are resilient enough to recover from loss on their own if they have social support.

Contrary to popular belief, most people do not pass through progressive phases of grief. New research suggests that most bereaved people experience a wide range of emotions that come and go and eventually subside with time.

While there is no “normal” time period for someone to grieve, most people take months or years to come to terms with a significant loss. If you are still experiencing intense, debilitating grief 18 months after the death of a loved one, you may want to speak with a mental health professional.

Physical reactions

Grief is stressful on the body. When you first experience a significant loss, your body becomes flooded with adrenalin and other chemicals that can produce many types of physical reactions.

Cognitive reactions

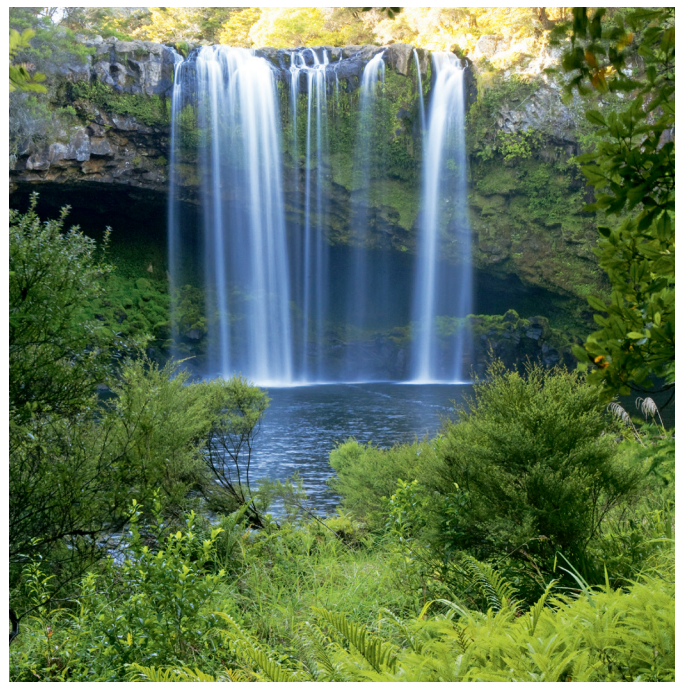
Grief also may take a temporary toll on your cognitive abilities. The same chemicals that produce physical reactions may also cause confusion, disorientation, forgetfulness or concentration problems. It isn't unusual for grieving people to take more time than usual completing simple tasks. Be patient with yourself. These reactions are normal and generally dissipate over time.

Emotional reactions

Losing someone you love is deeply painful. You may experience many difficult emotions and fear the sadness and sense of loss will never stop. Your feelings are normal, but the intensity of your emotions will subside over time.

Behavioral reactions

Following the death of a loved one, you may not feel you are “acting like yourself.” You are adjusting to a new reality and it may take time to feel like yourself again.





Healing strategies

Mourning the loss of a spouse, relative or close friend takes time. Grieving individuals may find it useful to use some of the following strategies to learn to cope.

Talk about it.

Many people find it healing to talk about the death of a loved one with friends and colleagues. Sharing your feelings with others can help you enlist the support you need to cope.

Accept your feelings.

People experience many emotions after someone close to them dies. Sadness, anger, frustration, exhaustion and even relief are all normal.

Take care of yourself and your family.

Eating well, exercising and getting plenty of rest will help you get through your day and move forward with the healing process.

Plan ahead for grief triggers.

Anniversaries, birthdays and milestones can reawaken memories and painful feelings. This is normal, but it can help if you are prepared. If you are sharing a holiday or gathering with other family members, talk to them ahead of time about your expectations and possible strategies to honor your loved one.

Remember and celebrate your loved one's life.

You may choose to remember and celebrate your loved one's life in a variety of ways. You may want to donate time or money to your loved one's favorite charity, frame photos of fun times, plant a garden in your loved one's memory or even pass on a family name to a baby. Honor your relationship to your loved one in a way that feels right to you.

Get help if you need it.

If you feel stuck or overwhelmed by your emotions, it may be helpful to talk with a mental health professional who can help you cope and get back on track.

Notes

