



## the many forms OF LOSS

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GoodTherapy Blog

Anyone who has lost somebody they love will likely agree the death of someone close usually causes a deep and painful grieving process. The people you care about typically validate these losses, understand they cause pain, and offer comfort and support. They don't always give you what you need, but many at least try.

But what about a loss in which nobody died? Does it count as grief?

There are many examples of loss that don't necessarily involve death, such as:

- Loss of a career you cherished
- Loss of a role you played in your community or church
- Loss of health
- A loss of closeness to a family member or friend
- A decline in financial status
- Divorce

It may be hard to imagine going through one of the above experiences without feeling the pain of loss – also known as grief. If you experience similar circumstances, you may find yourself asking for support and not getting it. Others may not understand the magnitude of your pain, so they don't validate your loss. Of course, people who have lost someone to death get disappointing responses, too, but experiencing a loss that doesn't involve a death may feel like you're doing it all on your own without the support of peers or loved ones.

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### COUNSELOR COLUMN

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**Q: I got some bad news recently and took it really hard. My family says I should be over it by now, but I'm not. What's going on?**

**A:** Grief is a complex response to a loss. Grief is frequently associated with the loss of a loved one, however the grief response can also occur when something important in our life has been lost. A grief response can occur with the loss of a job, the ending of a relationship or marriage, or a significant life change such as a medical diagnosis or retirement. Mental health professionals conceptualize these types of loss as an ambiguous loss, because those losses involve living individuals.

Grieving an ambiguous loss can be difficult for the individual for a variety of reasons. If you are grieving the loss of a relationship or marriage, you may still have contact with your friend or ex-partner through common social settings or co-parenting arrangements. In the case of a lost job or retirement, grieving can be difficult because the place where

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## 5 TIPS FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING GRIEF AND LOSS

What can you do when you experience losses like these to help yourself feel better? Here are some ideas that might help:

### 1. Name and validate your own emotions.

Acknowledging the story of the pain by writing down what happened can sometimes be a reality check that helps you see you aren't flawed, but that your circumstances are difficult. One of the most common responses to emotional pain I see is the belief that there must be something wrong with us if we feel so bad. But big emotions will come with big experiences. Acknowledging the importance of the loss and giving yourself a break may help you recover.

### 2. Be kind to yourself.

Engage in calming or distracting activities such as meditation, do physical exercise that you enjoy, or engage in a connecting conversation with a friend. All these activities take your mind off the pain and offer you a positive experience instead. Positive experiences can work to rewire your brain toward a more optimistic and hopeful focus.

### 3. Remind yourself of that which makes you grateful.

Making a daily practice of noticing what we're grateful for helps orient us toward what is already working. The more you think about what is good, the more good you'll likely find. The brain's natural tendency is to focus on what isn't working because you've been programmed that way through evolution. Instead, make note of what is good when faced with those grief-drenched days that feel certain to be sad and heavy. It doesn't have to be limited to big things: the tangy smell of a fresh lemon, your two hands that do so much for you and others, that songbird singing outside your window. Putting your attention on these kinds of small, wondrous experiences can go a long way toward healing after a painful loss.

### ENGAGE IN CALMING OR DISTRACTING ACTIVITIES

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### 4. Engage in positive self-talk.

It's important you not get caught up in blaming yourself or identifying your character "defects" as part of your grief process. Some people naturally gravitate toward self-blame when something goes wrong. Even if there was something you could have done, you're human like the rest of us. You deserve the same kindness and understanding you would offer a friend. Be careful you don't make things worse by inflicting negative messages on yourself. Chances are excellent you don't deserve them, and they'll only make you feel worse.

### 5. Talk to somebody who's a good listener.

If you have a best friend or family member who's a good listener, you can engage them in some meaningful conversations about your pain. If they grow weary of listening or you're not quite getting what you need, you can talk to a therapist, who, in many ways, is a professional listener. Therapists are trained to listen objectively and offer support and guidance that can help you find your way out of the morass. Remember, what you're experiencing is very real, and you don't have to go through it alone.

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## COUNSELOR COLUMN CONT.

you use to work is still there and maybe you still have contact with old co-workers.

While it can be challenging to grieve these ambiguous losses, it is important that we allow ourselves time to go through the grieving process and adapt to what our "new normal" looks like.

Regardless of the type of loss, the grief response can look different for every person and there is no set timeline for our grief. In the past, grief had been conceptualized as stages an individual goes through until reaching acceptance of the loss. However, current research indicates that grief is a process of exploring the meaning and significance of the loss. There are a variety of emotions you may experience during the grieving process including sadness, anger, guilt, disbelief, etc. You may also notice changes in your mood, sleep, and appetite.

### How can you take care of yourself during times of grief?

- **Allow yourself to grieve.** Acknowledge that you are experiencing a loss and give yourself permission to go through the grieving process. Be patient with yourself. Remember, there is no timeline for grief.
- **Engage your support network.** Seek out support from your significant other, family or friends. Whether it be to express your feelings of grief or engage in social interaction, seeking support can be beneficial.
- **Engage in self-care.** During times of grief it is important to take care of yourself by getting sleep, drinking water and eating healthy.
- **Seek professional support.** Whether or not you are having difficulty managing your grief on your own, visiting with a mental health professional can help guide you through the grieving process.

### How can you support someone who is grieving?

- **Allow the individual time to grieve.** Whether or not you are able to understand their grief, allow them time and space to grieve. Be patient with them. Be aware of how your words can impact the individual. Avoid using phrases such as "get over it," "it's for the best," or "you should just move on."
- **Encourage professional help.** Talk with the individual about visiting with a mental health professional about their grief.

Know that The Village Employee Assistance Program is always here for you. Call 800-627-8220 to schedule an appointment.

Sources: Meyers, 2016; Sarkis, 2016