

Understanding and Coping with Grief, Loss and Tragedy

There can be a range of responses to loss, and listed below are some typical reactions that you may be experiencing personally or may recognize in others. These responses are all considered part of normal human reactions to loss.

<u>Physical Reactions</u>	<u>Cognitive Reactions</u>	<u>Emotional Reactions</u>
Fatigue/exhaustion	Difficulty concentrating	Guilt
Sleep disturbance	Difficulty solving problems	Feelings of helplessness
Underactivity/over activity	Preoccupation with the loss	Emotional numbing
Change in appetite	Difficulty making decisions	Emotional sensitivity
Digestive problems	Memory disturbance	Fear/anxiety
Nightmares	Revenge fantasies	Sense of hopelessness
Muscle tremors/twitches	Lowered attention span	Hypervigilance
Headaches	Fears about one's own mortality	Anger/irritability
Startle reactions		Moodiness

When someone dies, their loss affects many people. Try not to pass judgment on others' reactions, especially if they are different from your own. For some people a tragic event can trigger feelings and memories associated with other traumatic events in their lives. Family and friends might experience conflict resulting from the following:

- Differences in opinion about how grief should be expressed
 - Beliefs about who is "entitled" to grieve based on closeness of the relationship with the person who died
 - Differences in how quickly friends or family members appear to recover from the loss
 - Unresolved conflicts with the person who died
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While there is little anyone can do to take away these difficult and uncomfortable feelings, there are several things you can do to help reduce the intensity of distress.

- Keep to your normal routine as much as possible
- Accept your responses (and others') as normal human reactions
- Write a letter to the person you lost; writing can help clear your mind of intrusive thoughts
- Engage in a ritual that honors your loved one and that creates positive memories
- Use exercise to reduce negative emotions and stress
- Do not attempt to numb your emotional pain with drugs or alcohol
- Reach out to others and spend time with people you trust and cherish
- Use extra care when driving or engaging in tasks that require close attention and skill
- Listen carefully when others express their grief
- Be forgiving of friends and family (and yourself!) whose grief may lead them to behave in uncharacteristic ways
- Give yourself permission to fall apart, feel terrible, or cry
- Meditate or pray
- Consider using art or music to express feelings when words fail you
- Use the loss to help you clarify your values and focus on what is important to you

The Counseling Center is available for confidential counseling and consultation.
Please call 610.330.5005 to schedule an appointment.