

# How to Deal With Grief

**Publisher:** SAMHSA

**Publication date:**

**Publication ID:** KEN01-0104



Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration  
1 Choke Cherry Road • Rockville, MD 20857 • 1-877-SAMHSA-7



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

# How to Deal With Grief

## How does grief differ from depression?

Depression is more than a feeling of grief after losing someone or something you love. Clinical depression is a whole body disorder. It can take over the way you think and feel. Symptoms of depression include:

- A sad, anxious, or “empty” mood that won’t go away
- Loss of interest in what you used to enjoy
- Low energy, fatigue, feeling “slowed down”
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Loss of appetite, weight loss, or weight gain
- Trouble concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Feeling hopeless or gloomy
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Thoughts of death or suicide or a suicide attempt
- Recurring aches and pains that don’t respond to treatment.

## What is grief?

Grief is the normal response of sorrow, emotion, and confusion that comes from losing someone or something important to you. It is a natural part of life. Grief is a typical reaction to death, divorce, job loss, a move away from family and friends, or loss of good health due to illness.

## How does grief feel?

Just after a death or loss, you may feel empty and numb, as if you are in shock. You may notice physical changes such as trembling, nausea, trouble breathing, muscle weakness, dry mouth, or trouble sleeping and eating.

You may become angry—at a situation, a particular person, or just angry in general. Almost everyone in grief also experiences guilt. Guilt is often expressed as “I could have, I should have, and I wish I would have” statements.

People in grief may have strange dreams or nightmares, be absent-minded, withdraw socially, or lack the desire to return to work. While these feelings and behaviors are normal during grief, they will pass.

## How long does grief last?

Grief lasts as long as it takes you to accept and learn to live with your loss. For some people, grief lasts a few months. For others, grieving may take years.

The length of time spent grieving is different for each person. There are many reasons for the differences, including personality, health, coping style, culture, family background, and life experiences. The time spent grieving also depends on your relationship with the person lost and how prepared you were for the loss.

## How will I know when I’m done grieving?

Every person who experiences a death or other loss must complete a four-step grieving process:

1. Accept the loss.
2. Work through and feel the physical and emotional pain of grief.
3. Adjust to living in a world without the person or item lost.
4. Move on with life.

The grieving process is over only when a person completes the four steps.

## What if these feelings won't go away?

If you recently experienced a death or other loss, feelings of grief are part of a normal reaction. But if these feelings persist with no lifting mood, ask for help. Contact:

### **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)**

730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501  
Chicago, IL 60610-7224  
800-826-3632  
<http://www.dbsalliance.org>

### **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**

Colonial Place Three  
2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201-3042  
Local: 703-524-7600  
Toll-free helpline: 800-950-NAMI (950-6264)  
<http://www.nami.org>

### **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**

Public Information and Communications Branch  
6001 Executive Boulevard, Suite 8184, MSC 9663  
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663  
Local: 301-443-4513  
Toll-free: 866-615-6464  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

### **National Mental Health Association (NMHA)**

2001 N. Beauregard Street, 12th Floor  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
Local: 703-684-7722  
Toll-free: 800-969-NMHA (969-6642)  
<http://www.nmha.org>

## Where can I find help?

The following list of organizations and Web sites provides information and support for coping with grief:

### **The Compassionate Friends (national office)**

P.O. Box 3696  
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696  
630-990-0010; Toll Free 877-969-0010  
<http://www.compassionatefriends.org>

A national, self-help support organization for those grieving the loss of a child or sibling.

### **Fernside**

Bethesda Professional Building  
4360 Cooper Road, Suite 101  
Cincinnati, OH 45242  
513-745-0111 (M - F 9:30 am - 4:30 pm EST)  
<http://www.fernside.org>

Grief information, resources, and support for grieving children and their families.

### **RENEW: Center for Personal Recovery**

P.O. Box 125  
Berea, KY 40403  
859-986-7878  
<http://www.renew.net>

A grief counseling center for individuals and families that are experiencing loss, with a specialty in grief recovery counseling for traumatic deaths.

## Online Resources

### **GriefNet**

<http://www.griefnet.org/>

A Web site that provides information and resources related to death, dying, bereavement, and major emotional and physical losses.

### **Growth House, Inc.**

<http://www.growthhouse.org>

A source of quality information and resources on death and dying issues.

**Transformations**

<http://www.transformations.com>

A web site about self-help, support, and recovery issues.