



What Normal Grief Looks and Feels Like

Laurel Lagoni, M.S.

You might think grieving means crying and feeling sad, but it is so much more than that! Grief is the natural and spontaneous response to loss. Everyone grieves, although the way you grieve might differ from others. Grieving is another word for emotional healing. The process of grieving can last several weeks, months and even years and, normally, painful feelings of grief will become less frequent and less intense as time goes by.

When you grieve, every aspect of your life is affected. Though your grief is personal and unique, there are many normal, predictable reactions to loss. These reactions occur in your body, your thoughts, and in your social, emotional and spiritual life. The following chart shows common signs of grief in each of these areas. Please post this handout on your refrigerator or carry it with you in your purse or billfold. Use it to remind yourself that you are healing and that the grief you are feeling is normal and to be expected.

Physical	crying, sobbing, wailing, shock, numbness, dry mouth, a lump in the throat, shortness of breath, stomach ache, nausea, tightness in the chest, restlessness, fatigue, exhaustion, sleep and appetite disturbance, body aches, stiffness of joints or muscles, dizziness, light-headedness
Intellectual	denial, sense of unreality, confusion, inability to concentrate, preoccupation with loss, visual, auditory, and olfactory visions or sensations of your loved one, a recurring need to reminisce about your loved one and to talk about the circumstances of the loss, a sense that time is passing very slowly, a desire to rationalize or intellectualize feelings about the loss, thoughts or fantasies about suicide (concrete plans/risky behaviors are not normal)
Emotional	sadness, anger, depression, guilt, anxiety, relief, loneliness, irritability, a desire to blame others for the loss, resentment, embarrassment, self-doubt, lowered self-esteem, feelings of being overwhelmed or out of control, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, feelings of victimization, giddiness, affect that is inappropriate for the situation such as nervous smiling and laughing
Social	feelings of withdrawal, isolation and alienation, a greater dependency on others, a rejection of others, rejection by others, a reluctance to ask others for help, change in friends or in living arrangements, a desire to re-locate or move, a need to find distractions from the intensity of grief by staying busy or over-committing to too many activities
Spiritual	bargaining with God in an attempt to prevent loss, feeling angry at God when loss occurs, renewed or shaken religious beliefs, feelings of being either blessed or punished, searching for a meaningful interpretation of your loved one's death, paranormal visions or dreams concerning your dead loved one, questioning whether or not souls exist and wondering what happens to loved ones after death, the need to "finish business" with your loved one, the desire to create a purposeful ending or closure to the relationship with a funeral, memorial service, or last rites ceremony

For more information visit the Veterinary Wisdom Resource Center at www.veterinarywisdompetparents.com 