



Understanding Grief & Bereavement

FOR YOUNG ADULTS &
ADOLESCENTS



nami

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Mercer

Serving the New Jersey Capital Area

Disclaimer

This Toolkit is NOT meant to be used as a way to diagnose yourself or others. It is meant to be a guide to help you understand what kind of grief you or someone close to you might be facing. If you believe you or a loved one are struggling with grief, please reach out to a licensed mental health professional. Any number within

Parenttheses is meant to indicate the source that the information came from. All sources can be found in the references section.

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Author's Note

This Toolkit was made by Stosh Omiecinski at NAMI MERCER and was made with the intention of providing information and resources for Young Adults and Adolescents who may be struggling with the loss of a loved one. It can be hard to put a name to our grief and understand it. Hopefully this toolkit will help you learn to recognize your grief and how to move forward with it.



Immediate Resources

If you are in crisis and need immediate help, please use one of the resources listed here:

24/7 National Hotlines

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 988
Crisis Text Line - Text "HOME" to 741741

24/7 New Jersey Hotlines

NJ Hopeline - 1-855-654-6735

LGBTQ Resources

The Trevor project - (212) 695-8650

Trans Lifeline - 1-877-565-8860

Domestic / Sexual Violence Hotlines

National Domestic Violence Hotline - 800-799-7233

National Sexual Assault Hotline - 1-800-656-4673

Young Adult and Adolescent Grief Statistics

30% of college students are within 12 months of experiencing a loss (2)

39% of college students are within 24 months of experiencing a loss (2)

1 in 5 children will experience the death of someone close to them by age 18 (6)

In a poll of 1,000 high school juniors and seniors, 90% indicated they had experienced the death of a loved one (6)

What is Grief?

Grief is the natural response to loss. That loss produces emotional responses that can lead to changes in your daily function and emotional pain. (29)

Bereavement is the grief experience that occurs after the death of someone close to you.

(25)



What Causes Grief ?

Grief occurs as a response to loss or drastic changes to our everyday lives (5)

Some Causes of Grief Include...

- Loss of a loved one
- Loss of a Pet
- Unemployment (5)
- Loss of Support Services (5)
- Anticipated Deaths

The causes for your grief are personal to **YOU**. There is no "unacceptable" kind of loss to grieve.

Emotional Symptoms of Grief

You may experience the following emotions in waves (25). Certain symptoms may not happen to some people (30) and can last for either weeks, months or years after the death. (30)



Profound Sadness (25)



Fear (29)



Guilt (29)



Anger towards people/things related to the loved one's death (25)



Shock/Disbelief or Confusion (29,17)



Difficulty accepting the person is gone/ Struggling to move on (25)



Emptiness (25)

(17)Mental Health America. (2019, November 2). Bereavement and grief. Mental Health America. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.mhanational.org/bereavement-and-grief>

(25)Robinson, L., & Smith, M. (2021, October). Bereavement: Grieving the loss of a loved one. HelpGuide.org. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/bereavement-grieving-the-death-of-a-loved-one.htm>

(29)Smith, M., Segal, J., & Robinson, L. (2021, October). *Coping with Grief and Loss*. HelpGuide.org. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm>

(30)Stanford Children's Health. (2015, October 9th). Default - Stanford Children's health. Grief and Bereavement. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=grief-and-bereavement-90-P03048>

Physical Symptoms of Grief

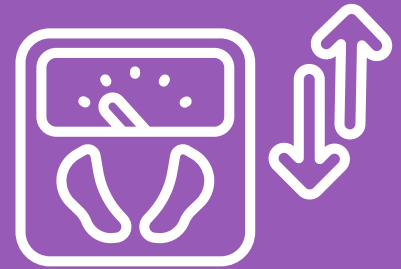
Certain symptoms may not happen to some people (30) and can last for either weeks, months or years after the death. (30)



Fatigue (29)



Nausea (29)



Weight Gain/Loss (29)



Changes in Appetite (25)



Lowered/Impaired Immune System (29)



Aches/Pains (29)



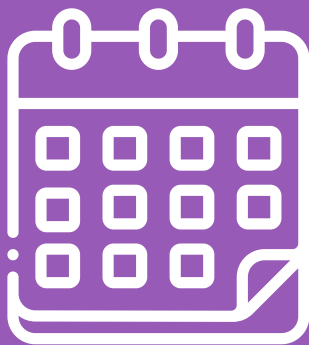
Insomnia/ Difficulty Sleeping (29)

Different Kinds of Grief

Grief can come in different forms than just conventional grief. They share symptoms but differ by circumstances and emphasize certain symptoms. This toolkit will cover **3** kinds of Grief that are relevant for Bereavement:



Disenfranchised Grief

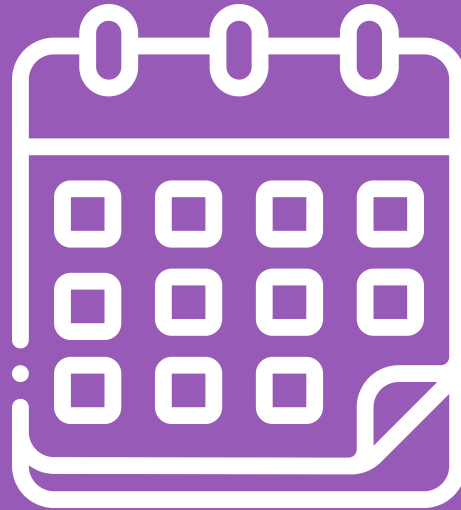


Anticipatory Grief



Complicated Grief

Anticipatory Grief



Anticipatory Grief is when a loved one's death is being anticipated, causing the grieving process to begin before their death (29). It is characterized by feelings of anger and hopelessness and a fixation on the loved one that is dying.

• **Losses related to Anticipatory Grief: (29)**

- Aging/Terminally Ill Loved one
- Aging/Terminally Ill Pet
- Imminent Job Loss/Retirement

Symptoms of Anticipatory Grief



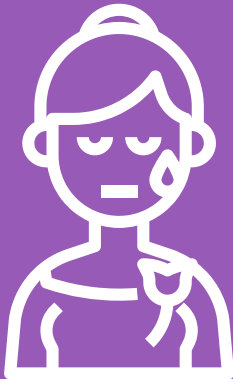
Anxiety/ Increased Concern for the Person (28)



Imagining what life after their death will be like (28)



Mourning Changes in the person's appearance/personality (28)



Triggered Sadness/Tears from reminders of the person (28)



Loneliness (28)



Reluctance to grieve or express sadness before the loss (28)

Disenfranchised Grief



Disenfranchised Grief is when your loss is not validated or recognized, preventing you from grieving openly (29). It is characterized by feelings of shame and guilt (12) and the stigma is usually on your relationship to the person or how they died (35).

Losses related to Disenfranchised Grief: (35)

- Death of a same-sex partner/Ex-partner
- Death of a Co-worker
- Death by Suicide
- Death by Overdose

Symptoms of Disenfranchised Grief



**Difficulty talking
about the loss with
others (35)**



**Feeling that the death
is not deserving of
being grieved due to
societal pressure (35)**



**Feeling the need
to hide your grief
due to guilt or
shame (35)**



Loneliness (35)



**Believing you don't
deserve to grieve because
your loss is not accepted
or validated (12)**

Complicated Grief



Complicated Grief is when you are stuck grieving the loss (29) for a prolonged period of time, which obstructs your ability to move forward and interferes with your ability to function (21). **If you are dealing with complicated grief, you should work with a qualified professional to help you, as complicated grief does not go away on its own (21).**

Losses related to Complicated Grief: (1)

- Death of a Loved one

Symptoms of Complicated Grief

Symptoms of Complicated Grief continue to appear 1 year after the loss for adults and 6 months after for Children and Adolescents (1)



Intense longing/yearning of your lost loved one (25)



Intrusive thoughts/ fixation on the lost loved one(25)



Disbelief of the Death (25)



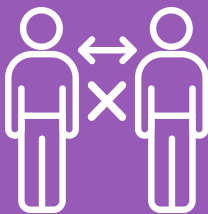
Feeling like a part of yourself has been lost (1)



Feeling Intense Anger or Sorrow towards the loss (1)



Avoiding Reminders of the Loss (25)



Difficulty reconnecting with friends/ returning to regular activities (1)

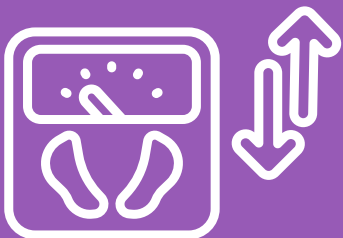


Intense Loneliness/ Feeling Detached from others (1)



Feeling Intense Emotional Pain because of the loss (1)

Symptoms of Complicated Grief



Weight Gain/Loss (3)



**Insomnia/ Sleep
Disturbances (3)**



**Stress induced
pains/illnesses(3)**



**Increased risk of
Addiction (3)**



**Feeling Personally
Responsible for the loss
(3)**



**Difficulty doing
everyday tasks (3)**



**Feeling hopeless or that
your life has no
purpose/meaning (23)**



**Developing Phobias
Based on the loss (e.g
Developing a fear of
driving if you lost
someone to a car crash)
(3)**



**Feeling Emotionally
numb due to feeling
unable to cope with
your emotions (23)**

What is it like to have Complicated Grief ?

Here are some examples from Columbia University's Center for Prolonged Grief:

"You think so much about the loss that it's hard to do normal, everyday things that used to be second nature...like taking good care of others, including children, going to work or concentrating at work, cooking, shopping, paying bills, exercising" (32)

"You find that memories of a loved one are upsetting and it's reassuring to be upset because it means you are not moving on and leaving your loved one behind." (32)

"You feel like running away even though this doesn't make sense and you know it's not the way to deal with difficult situations - doing this even if you are a person who usually faces problems and figure them out" (32)

"You do "crazy" things to try to escape from the pain, like almost pretending the person is still here - asking questions over and over, continuing to do things you did when your loved one was sick, obsessing over how many places to set at the table, keeping their clothes and other possessions ready for them, continuing to make the deceased person's favorite meals." (32)

Important Considerations for Complicated Grief

An adult is considered to have complicated grief if they continue to display multiple symptoms of grief one year after the Loss (1)

An Adolescent/Child is considered to have Complicated Grief if they continue to display multiple symptoms of grief 6 months after the loss (1).

Older Adults and people with a history of bipolar or depression are at higher risk of developing complicated grief (1).

Complicated Grief can occur along with other trauma related mental disorders such as PTSD, Depression or Anxiety (1). It can be very easy to confuse Complicated grief for PTSD.

If you believe that you are struggling with Complicated Grief or a mental disorder, reach out to licensed mental health professional.
Never diagnose yourself.

Video Resources on The Different Kinds of Grief



Is This Complicated Grief? -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK99oRzzYO4>



Understanding Grief. Lecture II. Anticipatory Grief Grieving Loss that Hasn't Happened -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ck3yZ5aN2jg>



What is Disenfranchised Grief Just Give Me 2 Minutes -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6tWzTtCd5c

The 5 Stages of Grief

The 5 stages of grief are meant to describe the general stages of thoughts and emotions that one goes through when grieving a loss.

Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

Important Considerations of the 5 Stages Grief

The stages of Grief are Non-linear, meaning that you may experience different stages of grief at different times or not experience any stages at all (11).

It is not required to go through every stage of grief in order to heal (29)

It is very common for stages to not appear in the same order or to move forward and backwards between the stages (19). Going through a stage is not always a one time experience (30).

The way you grieve depends on your personality and your relationship to the person who died (20). The symptoms of grief you feel may differ depending on the kind of loss you experience (11).

How long it takes to heal from grief differs from person to person (29)

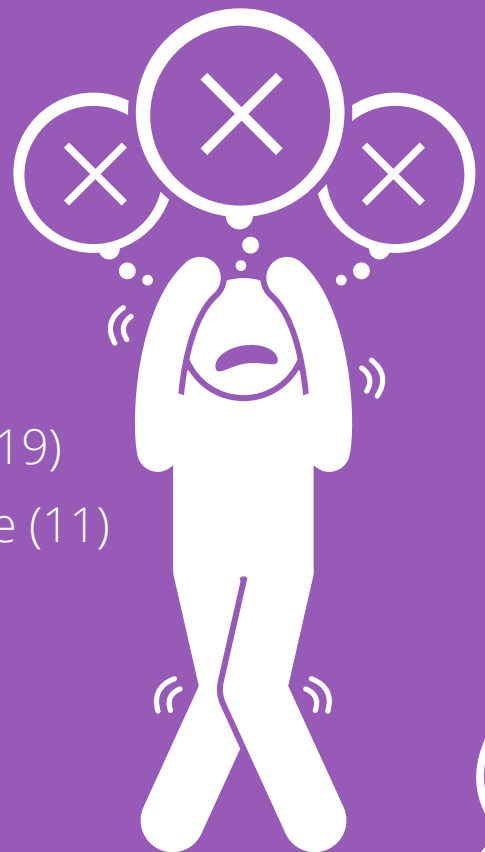
The grieving process is personal to YOU and can be influenced by your culture and societal expectations (19).

Denial

Denial is the stage of grief marked by a lack of acceptance or realization of the Loss (30).

Signs of Denial

- Avoidance (31)
- Procrastination (31)
- Forgetting (31)
- Easily Distracted (31)
- Mindless Behavior (31)
- Keeping busy all the time (31)
- Thinking or Saying "I'm fine" (31)
- Thinking "How could this Happen?" (19)
- Difficulty believing the person is gone (11)
- Shock (31)
- Numbness (31)
- Confusion (31)
- Shutting Down (31)



(11)Cruse Bereavement Support (2021, October 20). Understanding the five stages of grief. Cruse Bereavement Support. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.cruse.org.uk/understanding-grief/effects-of-grief/five-stages-of-grief/>

(19)Mind. (2019, July). What does grief feel like? Mind. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/experiences-of-grief/>

(30)Stanford Children's Health. (2015, October 9th). Default - Stanford Children's health. Grief and Bereavement. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=grief-and-bereavement-90-P03048>

(31)Stanaway, C. (2020, June 8). The stages of grief: Accepting the unacceptable. Counseling Center. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.washington.edu/counseling/2020/06/08/the-stages-of-grief-accepting-the-unacceptable/>

Anger

Anger is the stage of grief marked by feelings of anger towards the death or things related to the Loss (30).

Signs of Anger

- Pessimism (31)
- Cynicism (31)
- Sarcasm (31)
- Feeling out of Control (31)
- Embarrassment (31)
- Increased Alcohol/Drug Use (31)
- Anger towards the person who died or yourself (11)
- Being aggressive/passive-aggressive (31)
- Getting into Arguments/ Physical Fights (31)
- Thinking "Why me?" "This isn't fair" or "I don't deserve this" (31)



Bargaining

Bargaining is the stage of grief marked by questioning or seeking out answers to the loss (30). IT is notably characterized by feelings of Guilt (30).

Signs of Bargaining

- Guilt (31)
- Shame (31)
- Fear/Anxiety (31)
- Insecurity (31)
- Perfectionism (31)
- Over-thinking and worrying (31)
- Blaming yourself for the death (19)
- Thinking/Saying, "i should have" or "If only" (31)
- Ruminating on the future or past events with the person (31,11)
- Making deals with yourself (If I do X, then things will get better) (11)



(11)Cruse Bereavement Support (2021, October 20). Understanding the five stages of grief. Cruse Bereavement Support. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.cruse.org.uk/understanding-grief/effects-of-grief/five-stages-of-grief/>

(19)Mind. (2019, July). What does grief feel like? Mind. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/experiences-of-grief/>

(30)Stanford Children's Health. (2015, October 9th). Default - Stanford Children's health. Grief and Bereavement. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=grief-and-bereavement-90-P03048>

(31)Stanaway, C. (2020, June 8). The stages of grief: Accepting the unacceptable. Counseling Center. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.washington.edu/counseling/2020/06/08/the-stages-of-grief-accepting-the-unacceptable/>

Depression

Depression is the stage of grief marked by acknowledgement of the loss. It is the point where mourning the loss begins (30).

Signs of Depression

- Sadness (31)
- Crying (31)
- Hopelessness (31)
- Difficulty Sleeping (30)
- Reduced energy (31)
- Reduced Motivation (31)
- Feeling Isolated (19)
- Feeling Overwhelmed (31)
- Reduced social interest (31)
- Increased Alcohol or Drug Use (31)
- Thinking that life is meaningless (11)
- Sleep and appetite changes (31)



(11)Cruse Bereavement Support (2021, October 20). Understanding the five stages of grief. Cruse Bereavement Support. Retrieved June 26, 2022, from <https://www.cruse.org.uk/understanding-grief/effects-of-grief/five-stages-of-grief/>

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Acceptance

Acceptance is the stage of grief marked by acceptance of the loss (30).

Acceptance is when the loss and its effects are accepted, and you are able to begin moving forward (19).

It doesn't mean that your uncomfortable feelings will go away, but rather you learn to accept that those feelings will come and go as you move forward (31).

Signs of Acceptance

Signs of Acceptance

- Self-compassion (31)
- Believing there is a way to continue to live your life (11)
- Adapting, Coping, and Responding Skillfully (31)
- Assertive, non-defensive, honest communication (31)
- Engaging with reality as it is (31)
- Being able to be vulnerable & tolerate emotions (31)



Getting Support for Grief



Turn to family and friends (29)



Join a Support Group or a Mental Health Service (29)



Talk to a therapist or a Grief Counselor (29)



Seek support from faith based organizations (5)

Support Resources Page

The following links can provide further information and help you find support groups or grief programs that might help you:

The Dougy Center - <https://www.dougy.org/grief-support-resources/young-adults> - National Organization provides bereavement and grief services to children, teens, young adults and parents.

National Alliance for Grieving Children - <https://nacg.org/> - Provides resources for children and teens that are grieving a death

Actively Moving Forward - <https://healgrief.org/actively-moving-forward/young-adult-grief/> - Provide support and resources to Young Adults grieving a death

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - <https://afsp.org/ive-lost-someone> - Provide suicide education to those who have thought of, have survived or lost someone to suicide. Provides resources to those who have suicide.

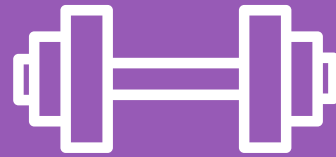
Compassionate Friends.org - <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/mission-statement/> - provides support to those who have lost a child or sibling.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) - <https://www.nami.org/Home> - provide information and support to those who are struggling with a mental illness

How to Help Yourself While Grieving



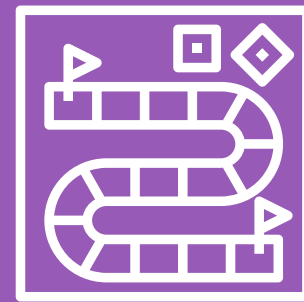
Express your feelings in a creative way (29)



Take care of your Physical Health (29)



Talk about the Loss/Death with your Loved ones (22)



Create new traditions with your loved ones (5)



Take care of yourself and your family (22)

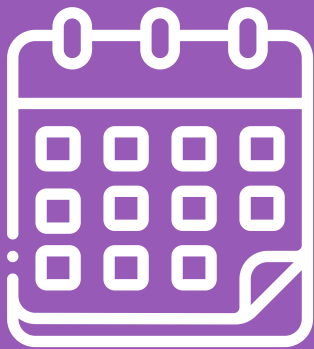


Try to maintain Hobbies and Interests (29)

Support Guide

This section provides more specified examples on how to cope with specific types of Grief or Loss that you might be facing:

Reminder : The way you grieve is completely personal to you. There is no right or wrong way to grieve a loss as long as it allows you to acknowledge and express your emotions and thoughts.



Processing
Anticipatory Grief/ An
Anticipated Death



Processing
Disenfranchised Grief



Processing
Complicated Grief



Processing losing
a loved one to
Suicide



Processing the
Death of a
Parent



Processing
the Death of a
Sibling



Processing
the Death of a
Peer



Processing
the Death of a
Pet



Processing Anticipatory Grief/ An Anticipated Death

- Create a Support Network that can help each other cope before and after the death (28)
- Focus on more short-term goals for your loved one. (Ex: making their day better (28)
- Addressing any unresolved problems you have with your loved ones(28)
- Resolving any legal or financial matters or discussing final wishes with your loved one(28)
- Allow yourself to experience feelings of grief as a way to prepare (34)
- Educate yourself on what to expect during the process and what you might feel (34)
- Reach out to loved ones or hire someone to take care of your loved one(34)
- Spend time with your loved one by doing activities they might enjoy (34)
- Allow yourself to find closure (Ask what needs to be resolved/forgiven, think about how they have impacted your life, etc. (24)



Processing Disenfranchised Grief

- Remind yourself that your grief/love for the person is valid and worthy of grieving (35)
- Reach out to people who have experienced similar losses (35)
- Allow yourself to create ways to commemorate their death. It can be done privately or publicly, but allow yourself to appreciate them (35)
- Build a support network with people that will be supportive of your loss that you can confide in without feeling judged (35)
- Find ways to allow yourself to grieve and express your emotions. Some ways include journaling, art, or photography but it can be whatever feels relieving to you! (35)


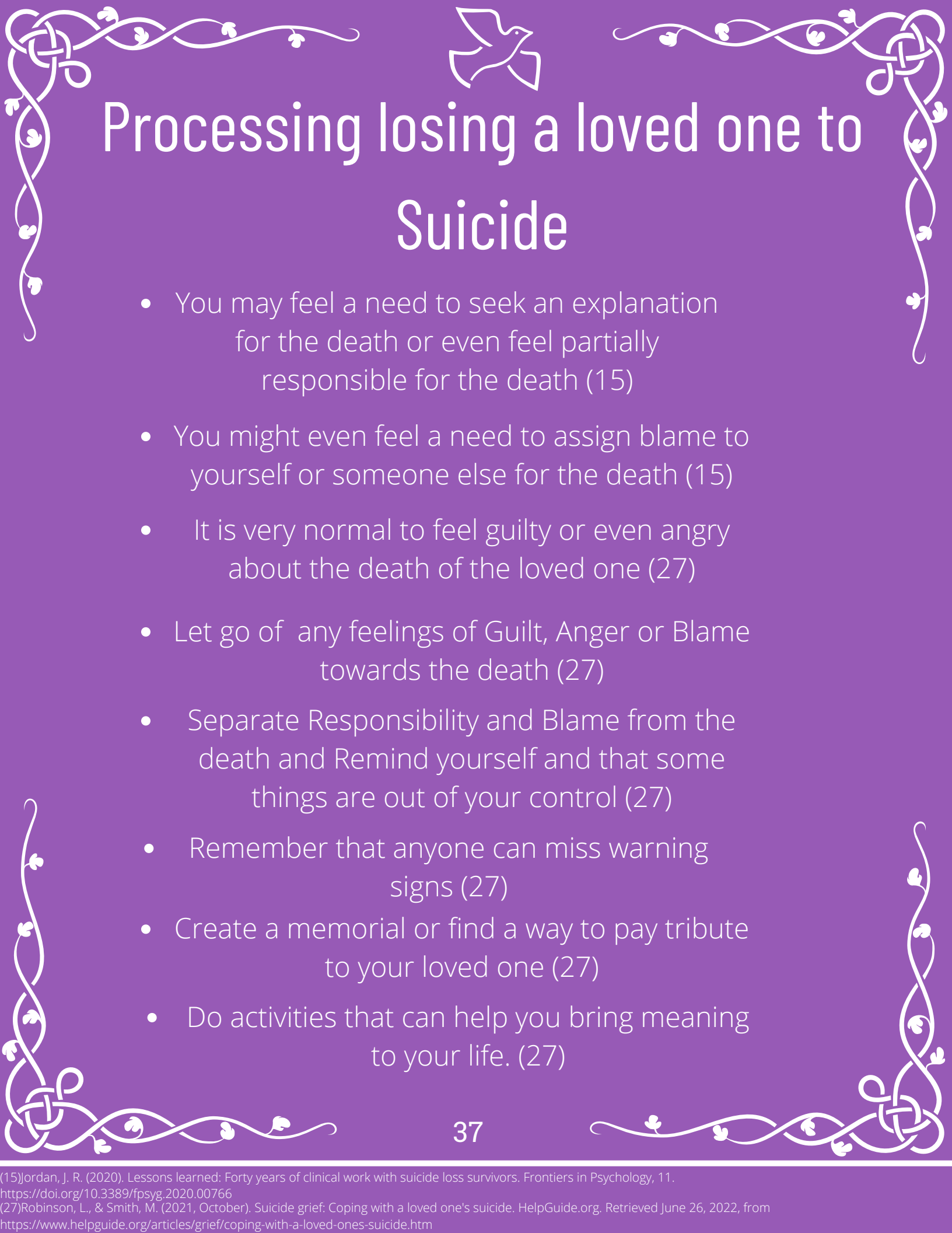


Processing Complicated Grief

- Seek out professional help. There are many kinds of treatment for Complicated grief...

- Complicated Grief Treatment (CGT) (32)
- Narrative Therapy (23)
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) (23)
- Supportive Psychotherapy (23)
- Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR) (18)

- Stick to your treatment plan. Make sure to keep attending your therapy appointments and practice skills you learn in your sessions (16)
- Manage your stress and work on your stress management skills (16)
- Reach out and socialize with friends and family. They can help support you as you grieve or can cheer you up (16)
- Reach out and socialize with friends and family. They can help you express your grief or provide a bit of joy in your life(16)
- Plan ahead for anniversaries or birthdays of your lost loved one and find new ways to celebrate them or their impact on you on those days (16)
- Join a support group. You might find comfort in meeting people with shared experiences as yours (16)



Processing losing a loved one to Suicide

- You may feel a need to seek an explanation for the death or even feel partially responsible for the death (15)
- You might even feel a need to assign blame to yourself or someone else for the death (15)
- It is very normal to feel guilty or even angry about the death of the loved one (27)
- Let go of any feelings of Guilt, Anger or Blame towards the death (27)
- Separate Responsibility and Blame from the death and Remind yourself and that some things are out of your control (27)
- Remember that anyone can miss warning signs (27)
- Create a memorial or find a way to pay tribute to your loved one (27)
- Do activities that can help you bring meaning to your life. (27)



Processing the Death of a Parent

- It is very normal to feel guilty or blame yourself for the death of your parents (25)
- You might feel a range of emotions such as Regret, Fear, or Anger. You might even feel like a child again after the loss (9)
- You might begin to focus on your mortality or question the value of your other relationships more often after the loss (14)
- Find ways to remember your parents such as making a memory box or a photo album (9)
- Prepare in advance for anniversaries or birthdays and think about how you will manage them. You can honor or celebrate them on those days. (9)
- Allow yourself to grieve and take as much time as you need (4)
- Seek support from a therapist or Grief Counselor to help you process your loss and develop coping mechanisms (4)
- Find activities or projects that can allow you to commemorate your parents such as volunteering or creative outlets to help you cope with the grieving process (4)



Processing the Death of a Sibling

- It is very normal to feel a range of feelings such as regret, confusion, survivor's guilt, anger, or shock (10, 33)
- It is very common to feel a connection with your sibling even after they're gone. You don't need to give up that connection in order to move on. (33)
- Reach out to friends and family and talk to them about the loss (10)
- Prepare in advance for anniversaries or birthdays and think about how you will manage them. You can honor or celebrate them on those days. (10)
- Journal your thoughts or write letters to the person as a way to help clarify your thoughts and maintain a connection with them (10)



Processing the Death of a Peer

- You can still grieve over the death of a friend even if you rarely saw them (13)
- You might be more aware of mortality after the death. You might find yourself investing more into and questioning your current friendships after the death. (13)
- If you shared a group of friends with deceased, try to be each others support network during the grieving process . Find a time to come together and remember/celebrate your friend. (8)
- Find ways to remember them such as keeping special items from them, making a photo album or making a memory box (8)
- Journal your thoughts or write letters to them so you can express any thoughts or feelings you've wanted to share (8)



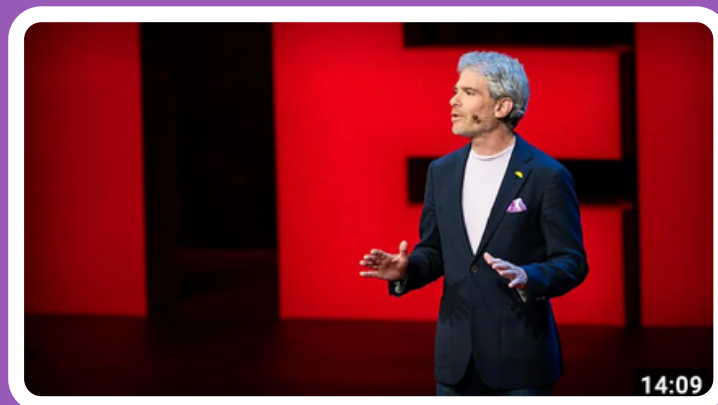
Processing the Death of a Pet

- Feeling emotional pain or grief over the death of a pet is normal. Any death of someone close to you is valid of grieving. (26, 7)
- Accept that you will be feeling many different emotions during this process. Take your time as you grieve and don't let other people invalidate that grief. (26)
- Reach out to other people who have lost a pet or find a pet loss support group (26, 7)
- Have a funeral for your pet to allow you and your family members to openly express their feelings (26)
- Create physical memories of your pets such as a photo album (7)
- If you have other pets, maintain regular routines with them and interact with them. It will help both you and your pets recover from the loss (26)
- If your grief becomes persistent and interferes with everyday function, reach out for professional help (26)

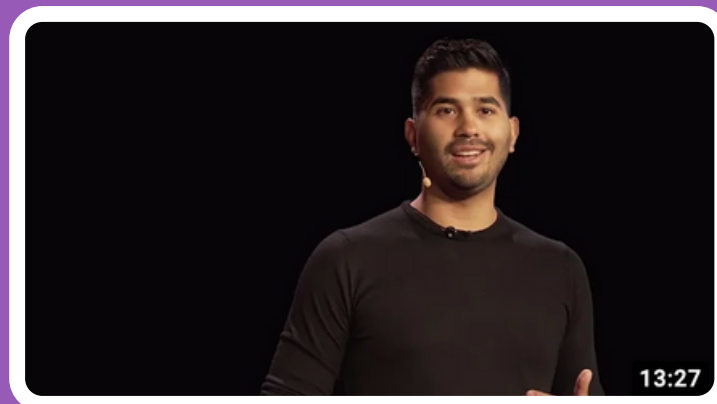
Additional Video Resources



We don't "move on" from grief. We move forward with it | Nora McInerny - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khkjkR-ipfw>



The journey through loss and grief | Jason B. Rosenthal - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhoCdZFoktQ>



Leave Your Light On; Compassion in a Time of Grief | Michael Tesalona - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nbJoaTC_10

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