The Compassionate Friends
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

In Partnership with NEW YORK LIFE FOUNDATION

FOR THE NEWLY BEREAVED

The death of a child, grandchild, or sibling is life altering. Grief can be intense, debilitating, and feel overwhelming, unbearable, and unbelievable all at the same time. Grief can ebb and flow. For some of us grief brings a feeling that we are walking around in a fog and that life does not have the same sense of meaning and purpose anymore. For others their grief manifests as a sense of disbelief, a deep consuming emotional and mental strain. Many of us have all these reactions and more. We may have a hard time being around others who are not grieving or who may be grieving differently than us. Grief is extremely disruptive to our lives and experiencing these extreme and powerful reactions is normal and to be expected. This does not mean that it is easy. For most people, grief after a profound loss is the hardest thing they will ever have to experience.

If you are new to your grief, we want you to know that you are not alone. The Compassionate Friends exists to offer comfort, community, and support to you and your family. We encourage you to connect with us by visiting our website at compassionatefriends.org where you will find resources, materials, and information about our, programs, local chapters, and virtual support options.

As you begin to explore information to better understand your grief and plan strategies for coping, we hope you find this article and the other resources we have made available helpful to you.. This article provides some basic information to help validate your grief experience and ideas for coping with your grief as you move through each day.

WHAT GRIEF IS LIKE

Grief impacts us emotionally, mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially. It is normal to experience grief on many levels. These are some of the reactions bereaved family members have reported:

- ***Emotional:*** Intense, seemingly unbearable emotional reactions, unpredictable and sometimes uncontrollable crying, sadness, anger, guilt, or fear.
- ***Mental:*** Being easily distracted, unable to focus on tasks, lack of motivation, and mental fogginess, as well as other mental health challenges like anxiety and depression. We may also experience intense longing for or ongoing thoughts about our person, their death, and how our life has changed.
- ***Physical:*** Grief also has physical symptoms like an aching sensation in the chest or stomach, changes in appetite or sleeping habits, feeling sluggish, tired, and exhausted, even when there has not been much physical activity.

- ***Spiritual:*** Leaning into and depending on deeply held spiritual beliefs, struggling with or adapting personal beliefs, questioning faith beliefs, anger associated with faith beliefs, comfort from faith beliefs.
- ***Social:*** A strain on social life, distancing oneself from others, others distancing themselves from you, or lacking the energy to be around others who are "going on with life as usual." Some report a loss of long-standing relationships, while others find these relationships strengthened.

Grief is a personal experience. Grief is, most often, an experience of finding your way in a new world that is unrecognizable. Each person has their own way of navigating the challenges of grief. While there might be commonalities in our grief with others, each person grieves in their own way. Even within families, different personalities, perspectives, and ways of being can lead to different experiences of grief and coping with loss. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Grief does not have a time limit. Though many have attempted to put time limits on what is an acceptable length of time to grieve, the reality is that grief does not have arbitrary time limits. Grief is not a process of getting over our loss. Grief is a normal reaction to our loss and a process of adapting that loss into our lives. This is different for everyone, grief ebbs and flows, and becomes a part of our life into the future. Someone once said that grief after a profound loss is a marathon, not a sprint. The intensity of our grief and our ability to find our footing after our loss takes much longer than we, and others in our lives, may want.

Grief is extremely disruptive and changes us. There are many stark realities that may unfold after the death of a child, grandchild, or sibling. Special occasions, birthdays, holidays, and sharing life's unique moments can be forever changed. Sometimes strained relationships can bring up past trauma or challenging aspects of our relationship with the person who died. Whatever this may look like for you, there are unique ways you are grieving because of the relationship you had with your child, grandchild, or sibling.

IDEAS FOR COPING

Though there is no right or wrong way to grieve, there are ways we can cope with grief that can be helpful. Here are a few ideas for coping with grief:

- Be patient with yourself – the intensity of grief and more challenging symptoms often takes much longer than we would like. It is important to be patient with yourself along the way. Give yourself credit for living through grief, even in the smallest ways.
- Build a community of support – Peer support works. Being with others who care, are understanding, and who can relate, is helpful. Maintain relationships with those who you can trust, who may not have had your specific type of loss, and also seek out those who have walked in your shoes. Visit the TCF website at www.compassionatefriends.org to learn more about how you can plug into our programs and peer support communities.
- Take care of yourself mentally and physically – It may sound simple, but doing some basic self-care makes a difference in your ability to carry your grief. Eating a healthy diet, implementing strategies to get sleep, moving your body and exercising are important. Stepping outside, breathing fresh air, meditating, taking walks, being in nature, and practicing mindfulness and gratitude are also ways to care for your mind and body while grieving.
- Give yourself permission to grieve and to also participate in life affirming activities – It may seem strange, but allowing yourself to experience the intense feelings of grief is a coping strategy. When we push grief inside, run from it, or try to avoid the feelings, these reactions often come back in force. Making time for grief, while also balancing life affirming activities like time with friends and family, leisure activities, hobbies, and other daily routines can help us as we adapt to our loss. Finding this balance may be difficult early in our grief. Be patient with yourself as you navigate all of the challenges of grief both early on and over time.

CONTACT US

877.969.0010
nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org
compassionatefriends.org