

COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

*A RESOURCE FOR SURVIVORS
AND FAMILIES*

trauma survivors

network 

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WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is a natural emotional response to loss, and it can appear in many forms throughout life. While most people associate grief with the death of a loved one, it can also emerge after the loss of abilities, independence, relationships, careers, or life plans.

For individuals recovering from an injury, grief may arise from the sudden changes in physical capacity, lifestyle, or future goals. These losses, both visible and invisible, can trigger sadness, anger, frustration, or a sense of emptiness, and navigating these feelings is an essential part of adapting to life after injury.



People may grieve the loss of their former self or the life they once imagined. Dreams may need to be adjusted or abandoned entirely, and routines that once brought comfort may no longer be possible. Grief can also appear as a reaction to repeated setbacks, such as ongoing rehabilitation challenges or chronic pain, reminding individuals of what has been lost. Recognizing that these emotional responses are normal is an important first step in coping with the complex experience of loss after injury.

Grief may resurface in waves, particularly during milestones or anniversaries, but gradually, individuals can integrate their experiences of loss into a renewed sense of identity and purpose.

Grief, whether due to death or injury, requires empathy, space, and time to process. If grief is impairing daily function, leads to thoughts of self-harm or harming others, or persistent or prolonged hopelessness and withdrawal, it is important to seek professional help immediately.

WHAT IS SURVIVORS GUILT?

Survivor guilt is a natural feeling that can happen after a traumatic event where someone survives but another person does not. Even though a survivor could not control what happened, they may feel sad, confused, or like they don't deserve to have lived.



For individuals injured in the same accident where someone else died, these feelings can feel especially strong, particularly when remembering what happened or thinking about what could have been done differently, even when nothing could have changed.

It is common to experience sadness, worry, or trouble sleeping along with guilt, and it can be even harder when the person lost was close, like a friend or family member. These feelings are a normal part of the healing process, and sharing them with caring friends, family, support groups, or a counselor can help survivors feel less alone and begin to find peace.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER THROUGH GRIEF



Grief is a deeply personal experience, and everyone processes it differently. Supporting each other during this time can help ease the burden and create a sense of connection and understanding. There are many ways to provide meaningful support to your loved ones and yourself as you navigate loss together.

Offer Practical Help

Sometimes the most meaningful support comes in the form of everyday assistance. Helping with meals, errands, or household tasks can relieve stress and create space for emotional healing. This can help loved ones focus on processing grief rather than managing day-to-day responsibilities.



Create Shared Rituals or Memories

Engaging in activities together can provide comfort and connections. Examples of rituals are lighting a candle in memory, planting a healing garden, creating a tangible memorial, or building memories together using a scapbook.

Support your Bodies

Remind each other to rest. Find an exercise to do together. Plan for meals or snacks together to feed your body comforting, nutritious foods.



PROCESSING GRIEF



Processing grief involves allowing yourself to feel emotions without judgment and finding constructive ways to work through them.

Emotional Symptoms of Grief

- Shock and disbelief
- Sadness
- Guilt
- Fear
- Anger
- Panic Attacks

Physical Symptoms of Grief

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Body aches and pains
- Trouble Sleeping

There are many strategies for processing grief alone, with your loved ones, and as a community. Below are a few ideas that may inspire you in finding the best way for you to process grief.

- Journaling thoughts and feelings to externalize emotions
- Creating small, meaningful rituals or monuments to honor what has been lost
- Practicing mindfulness and meditation
- Engaging in activities that bring moments of joy or connection
- Seeking support from friends, family, or Community
- Volunteering for a cause related to your loss
- Find creative releases for your feelings focused on creation, such as art, poetry, writing, baking, sculpting, etc.

Adapting to life after injury often means redefining what “normal” looks like. Grief may resurface in waves, particularly during milestones or anniversaries, but gradually, individuals can integrate their experiences of loss into a renewed sense of identity and purpose.

SHARING YOUR FEELING



Grief can feel isolating, but sharing your feelings with trusted friends, family, or support groups can be profoundly healing. Talking about your loss helps to validate your emotions, reduce feelings of isolation, and strengthen connections with others who care. When others understand what you are going through, they can offer comfort, encouragement, and practical support during difficult times. Simply expressing emotions—whether sadness, anger, or confusion—can relieve some of the weight grief imposes on both the mind and body.

Open communication also benefits family members and caregivers, helping them understand the emotional journey of their loved one and offering opportunities to provide meaningful support. By acknowledging and verbalizing grief, families can navigate the changes together, build empathy, and strengthen bonds, ultimately creating a foundation for healing and adaptation.

For those recovering from injury, sharing experiences with peers who have faced similar challenges can be particularly empowering. Support groups provide a safe space to talk openly, exchange coping strategies, and witness resilience in others. Listening and being heard in these environments fosters a sense of community, reminding individuals that they are not alone in their struggles and that grief is a shared human experience.

JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP



TSN support groups are available for injury survivors as well as for family and friends of survivors.



A GriefShare support group is a safe, welcoming place for people who have experienced loss of a loved one.

GRIEF AND CHILDREN



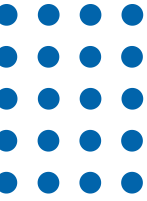
Children experience grief differently than adults, and their understanding of loss changes as they grow. This may be the first time your child has experienced grief and loss, whether from the death of a loved one or a significant change from injury.

Younger children may struggle with the concept of loss or death, not understanding the permanence. Older children may struggle with strong emotions or worries about the future. Children process grief and cope with loss differently. Alternating between grief and wanting to play and experience joy.

Whether a child is coping with the death of someone they love or adjusting to changes after an injury, it helps for caregivers to talk with them gently and honestly. Use simple words they can understand and avoid phrases that might be confusing. Let them ask questions. Encourage them to process their feeling through play or creative expression.

If you need support when talking to children about the situation, request a case manager, child life specialist, or faith services member join the conversation ahead of time.





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