

Coping with Grief and Loss



One of the most traumatic and difficult events we can experience is the death of someone we know. News of a death will generally trigger shock and intense emotional reactions, even if the loss has been anticipated due to illness. For some people, grieving (the period of coming to terms with realization that the deceased is no longer with us) can bring about strong and sometimes delayed reactions.

What reactions can be expected during the grieving process?

- While grieving is a normal process for all of us, the duration and intensity can vary depending on your relationship to the deceased and your history of personal loss.
- During the grieving process, those impacted must come to terms with the realization that the deceased will not come back, and gradually learn to live with the memories that remain.
- For many, grief is experienced through different stages (denial, sadness, anger, disorganization, acceptance, reorganization) during which your normal day to day functioning may be impacted to varying degrees.
- Identified stages of grief are not necessarily experienced as a sequential process. They are often referred to as a cyclical process. You may move in and out of these different stages at different times. In the very early grieving stage, after hearing the news, you may move in and out of numbness, interspersed with intense waves of grief which diminish over time. Waves of grief can return with varying degrees of intensity when certain events rekindle the feelings of loss (the person's birthday, the first office party without the person, etc.).
- Your reactions may include: feelings of sadness or anger; questioning the meaning of life in general or of one's own life; needing more solitude or more social support than usual; and experiencing concentration problems, irritability, or chronic fatigue.



- Work performance, such as difficulty maintaining focus and making decisions, may be experienced in the earlier stages of grieving.
- Everyone works through a grieving process in their own unique way and at their own pace. Although it differs for each individual, time will allow you to eventually and gradually feel a greater degree of acceptance and to regain a sense of stability that is comparable to, although different from, the stability you had before your loss.

How can you best manage your grief reactions?

- First, do not try to neglect your emotional reactions or minimize them. It is normal to need time to accept the loss and the time required for dealing with a loss is unique for every person.

- Give yourself permission to confide and share your feelings with those people you feel comfortable with, such as family, friends or other trusted associates.
- Stay as active as you can – structured activities and some form of exercise have proven to be very helpful in alleviating various levels of distress. Even 10 to 20 minutes of walking a day can support your recovery. Walking with someone you are comfortable with, can also lend itself to your mutual well-being.
- Resume your favourite activities, particularly those that energize you, and possibly embrace new activities that may support your well-being. Engaging in positive and rewarding behaviours is more within your control than willfully attempting to change your thoughts or emotions.
- As much as you can, reflect on how this event has impacted you and share these thoughts with the people closest to you.
- Even though you will be naturally affected in some way after receiving such unsettling news, we all need to resume our work responsibilities. The path to normal functioning and total focus may take days, weeks or months.
- If after a few days, you are finding it difficult to carry out your job responsibilities, consider addressing this with your manager and possibly a trusted co-worker.
- If you hold a safety sensitive position (a job that if compromised, could pose a public and workplace safety risk), discuss this immediately with your manager.
- Give yourself permission to move forward and gradually regain your normal sense of self.
- If after a few weeks, you find yourself struggling with the impact of the loss, consider seeking support from the Employee Family Assistance Program at Homewood Health to access support from a professional counsellor.