

# Grief

## Working Through Grief *Understanding the Healing Process*

Office of Health Education and Promotion  
Health Services



# Grief

## What is Grief?

Grief is a natural and normal reaction to any kind of loss. Some examples of loss include, but are not limited to:

- Loss of a job or other important endeavor
- Death of someone you love/care about
- Ending of an important relationship

Grief can create a variety of emotions that can range from deep sadness to anger. Some of these feelings may be new to you. Accepting and acknowledging that these are normal reactions in grieving is one of the first steps to healing from the loss.

# The Normal Cycle for all Losses

Everyone goes through a normal cycle of grief when dealing with a loss. Although the cycle of grief is universal, individual grief is not. We each grieve in our own way and enter each stage at our own pace. Some of us even visit one stage more than once. To begin to heal from a loss, it is important to understand the stages of feelings you will experience. Remember, all these feelings are normal.



# Grief

## Denial Shock and Disbelief

This is a typical first reaction after a loss. It is nature's way of protecting you from the impact of the loss for awhile.

You may:

- Have trouble believing the loss is real
- Feel numb
- Have a sense of being in a dream
- Keep expecting the loss to come back, even though your rational mind knows

## Anger or Resentment

This is a very common stage. Even if there is no one to blame for the loss.

You may:

- Feel like a great injustice has been done
- Be angry at others
- Be angry at your god
- Resent the person you have lost for leaving you alone

## Guilt

It's normal to regret things you did or didn't say, do or feel.

Some people may regret or feel guilty for:

- Not being there to say goodbye
- Being relieved that the person is gone
- Having arguments with the loved one when they were still in your life

# Depression

Loss can cause one to feel anxious, helpless, and extremely sad.

It's common to feel:

- Unable to handle new responsibilities
- Fearful about your own death
- Afraid to face life without the person you lost
- Lonely
- Like there is a hole in the center of your life
- A deep yearning for something more
- Like you are re-living all the other sadness you've had in your life

## Acceptance, Hope and Personal Growth

In time, the future begins to look hopeful, even though you may still feel pain for your loss. Working through grief may give you new strengths and insight.

You may:

- Feel that you have more empathy for others
- Have new confidence in yourself
- Want to explore new interests and relationships
- Have a greater understanding of what is important to you

## The Healing Process Allow Yourself to Grieve

There's no right or wrong way to feel or think about loss. Allow your feelings and thoughts to be what they are and don't be pressured by others' ideas of how you "should" or "have to" be. Crying, talking, writing or doing physical activities are great ways to express your feelings and thoughts.

You may experience physical , cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions as you grieve.

Some examples include:

- Fatigue
- Inability to concentrate
- Feeling overwhelmed
- depression/anxiety
- Withdrawal from others.
- Irritability
- Loss or increase of appetite
- Nightmares



These reactions are normal and will be determined by how to take care of yourself, the support system you have in place and the relationship you had with the person and or thing that you have lost.

# Take Care of Your Health

Grief can put a lot of stress on your body. You need to take extra care during this time to keep yourself healthy.

- Eat a healthy and balanced diet-choose a variety of fruits, vegetables and grains. Limit saturated and trans fats, sodium and added sugars.
- Drink plenty of water
- Get regular physical activity - at least 30 minutes every day.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Manage stress-set aside quiet time for yourself, learn relaxation techniques such as meditation, reach out to your friends for extra support.
- Avoid the use of alcohol and other drugs. Alcohol is a depressant and can make you feel more depressed after a night of drinking that you did the day before.
- Maintain a normal of schedule as possible.
- Keep a journal, write down your thoughts and feelings.

## Reach Out to People You Trust

This is the time to lean on friends, family, counselors and other supportive people who accept your feelings and thoughts, no matter what they are. Often, people want to help but don't know how. Try simply telling them what you need.

If you need more support outside of family and friends you may speak to a professional at the UNH Counseling Center or other campus resources.

# Unresolved/Complicated Grief

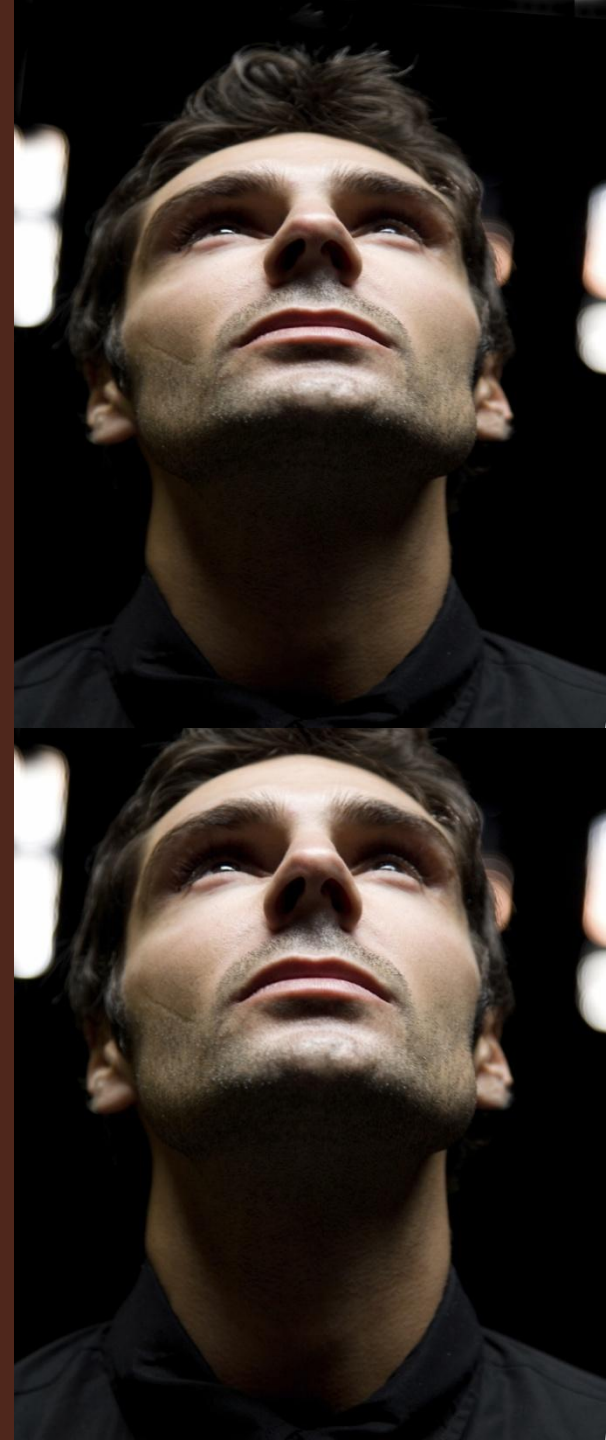
Sometimes people are unable to accept loss or to experience some of the emotions connected with loss. This is often called unresolved or complicated grief.

Symptoms include:

- Over an extended amount of time the person seems unable to move through the normal stages of grief.
- The person experiences prolonged physical difficulties such as loss of appetite, insomnia, fatigue, agitation, listlessness, loss of interest, or difficulty concentrating.
- The person expresses unreasonable or chronic guilt or thoughts of suicide.
- People with “normal” grief may also experience these reactions. But the reactions don’t tend to interfere with life as much or as long.

Unresolved/complicated grief is similar to depression and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The UNH Counseling Center offers counseling to help resolve complicated grief.



## Resources at UNH

There are many healthy ways to cope with grief. You can find ways that work for you. Know that there's plenty of resources at UNH if you need assistance.

- **Counseling Center, (603) 862-2090**  
Individual counseling and support groups
- **Office of Health Education and Promotion, (603)862-3823**  
Individual stress management, meditation, biofeedback counseling and education
- **Health Services, (603) 862-2856**  
Consultations with a medical clinician about your health
- **Resource Library, Health Services, (603) 862-3823**  
Books, DVDs and audios on a variety of health topics, including loss and grief. Library available for personal and research use for UNH students, faculty and staff.
- **United Campus Ministry, (603) 862-1165**  
Spiritual guidance, individual counseling, assistance finding additional spirituality support in the community