



# WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is a normal and natural reaction to death. Love and grief are inseparable – they are yin and yang. So when we lose those we love we experience grief. It is a normal response and it has been a part of the human condition since the beginning of time. You can see grief in every culture. Some cultures embrace this experience more directly than others. Some, unfortunately, sweep this experience under the rug or pathologize it as an abnormality.

GRIEF IS NOT JUST AN EMOTIONAL REACTION, THOUGH. GRIEF IS AN EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, SPIRITUAL, AND INTELLECTUAL EXPERIENCE.

**EMOTIONAL** – It is not uncommon to feel anger, numbness, relief, uncertainty, anxiety, fear, depression, apathy, sadness, and joy as a part of the grief experience. All emotions are valid and they vary based on all sorts of circumstances. See some of the variables that influence the grief experience below.

**INTELLECTUAL** – We experience a range of thoughts about grief, which can include blame, the idea that we could have prevented the death, we often try to “wrap our heads” around the fact that someone is gone, we frequently try to make sense of things, we may try to make meaning, and we may think that the death and our consequential circumstances are unjust. This component also forces us to reimagine our lives and change our expectations, hopes, and plans.

**SPIRITUAL** – As humans, we try to understand “how” and “why” bad things happen. Often times, this is where we do our meaning making. Religion may play a role, but our understanding of our lives and the meaning of life itself is often at play here. “He was such a good person. How could this of happened to him?” or “why didn't she ask for help?” etc.

**PHYSICAL** – Grief is exhausting! For adults, fatigue and feeling like you're in a fog is not uncommon. For kids, they often experience bellyaches and headaches. Without a safe environment to express their grief, kids often bottle it all up which leads to behavioral expressions that may get a child into trouble. It is not uncommon for grief to cause people to overeat or under eat. It is also not uncommon for a grieving body to be susceptible to illness, as the immune system is often weak during intense grief.

HERE ARE A FEW VARIABLES THAT WILL INFLUENCE GRIEF:

- Culture
- Support system
- The nature of the relationship
- Religion
- How the person died
- Comments that people make
- Stigmas
- And many external variables that are outside of the grieving person's control.