

Caring
— for —
Yourself
after a Death



SINGAPORE
HOSPICE
COUNCIL



CARING FOR YOURSELF AFTER A DEATH

Grief is our natural response to loss. Even when a death is expected, we still experience varying levels of grief responses when the death occurs. When all the necessary rites and rituals such as the wake, funeral, cremation, are completed and it is time to ease back into the routines of life, some of us may become more aware of our grief reactions.

Common grief reactions

Emotions

- Shock
- Disbelief
- Numbness
- Guilt
- Emptiness
- Worry
- Relief
- Anguish
- Sadness
- Anger
- Fear
- Helplessness
- Irritation
- Peace

Physical

- Numbness
- Restlessness
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Sleeping too much
- Fatigue/feeling tired all the time
- Headaches
- Chest tightness
- Muscle tensions
- Heart palpitations
- Stomach discomfort

Thoughts

- Confusion
- Self-blame
- Thoughts of injustice
- Difficulty concentrating
- Constantly reviewing certain events surrounding the death

Behaviour

- Crying
- Lack of care for hygiene, meals
- Difficulty carrying out daily tasks
- Withdrawal from friends or family
- Loss of interest in activities one previously enjoyed
- Preoccupied with personal belongings of loved one

Spiritual

- Anger at God or higher power
- Question your faith and meaning of life



Grief is unique

There is no “right” or “wrong” grief experience. There are good days and bad days. The stoic person does not necessarily experience less sadness than the person whose tears are streaming. One’s grief experience is also influenced by several factors, including:

- events leading to the death
- your emotional connection and relationship with the person you have lost
- your familial, social and religious support network
- your personality
- your previous experience with loss and grief
- the presence of other stressful events or situations during the period of grief



Grief has no timeline

Take your time to grieve. Some are able to adjust to a new life routine quicker, while others may require more time and a conscious effort to do so. It is not uncommon to still experience the sadness years after the loss.



Death ends a life, not a relationship

Death may have taken your loved one away from you physically, but the treasured memories will remain with you. As you draw on your inner strength and external support to continue living without your loved one, consider openly sharing or reminiscing the cherished memories of your loved one from time to time.



How you can help yourself as you grieve

Here are some steps you can take to help yourself through the grieving process:

- You may ask yourself “If only...” or “Why...” questions such as *If only I had called the doctor sooner. If only I had spent more time with him. Why did she have to die? Why didn't I do more?* Dwelling on the past is painful. Address your guilt and regrets if you have to, but allow some space for yourself to live in the present too.
- Take the time you need to find your footing in life again. Don’t compare your grief journey with others as each journey is unique.
- Be kind to yourself. Don’t pressure yourself to “move on” by a certain time.
- You may need to learn new skills or take up new roles, e.g. you may now need to be caregiver for your elderly mother, a role once played by your late father. Start with a simple routine, then gradually build up over time at a comfortable pace.

- Include some “me time” in your new routine to relax or even take the time to remember your loved one – listening to a favourite song, writing a letter, doing something you used to enjoy together.
- Rest well, eat healthily and engage in simple exercises or activities. Take care of yourself and your well-being.
- Spend some time with close family or friends. Grieving may be more manageable if you share your experience with people you trust and are comfortable with. Do not hesitate to let them know the type of support you need.

When it comes to birthdays, wedding anniversaries, death anniversaries, festivities or any other significant event, your feelings of sadness and sense of loss may intensify. It will be helpful to prepare yourself for such events in advance. You may want to plan your own way of commemorating the day. If you would prefer to be excused from the event, let your friends or family know beforehand.

When grief is a concern

While we encourage everyone to take their time to grieve and emphasise that each grief journey is unique, there are some individuals who may need further support in their grief journey. If you experience any of the following symptoms, or if people who know you well make such observations about you, it would be wise to seek professional help.

- Difficulty functioning in daily life
- Constantly thinking of the death and unable to focus on other things
- Excessive feelings of sorrow, anger, resentment or guilt
- Neglecting personal care, hygiene and grooming
- Substance abuse – turning to alcohol, drugs or other vices
- Hearing voices or seeing things that are not actually there
- Persistent thoughts and feelings of being worthless and hopeless
- Unable to find joy, positive feelings or meaning in life
- No longer taking part in social activities, e.g., meeting friends for meals, going for company events
- Having thoughts of suicide or self-harm

Seeking professional help will provide you with additional support for your grief journey. The following agencies provide bereavement support:

Children's Cancer Foundation

*For children who lost their caregivers to cancer
www.ccf.org.sg | Tel: 6229 3701*

Counselling and Care Centre

*For those who need bereavement counselling
www.counsel.org.sg | Tel: 6536 6366*

Hua Mei Counselling and Coaching

*For grieving elderly above 50 years old
www.tsaofoundation.org | Tel: 6593 9549*

Life Point

*For those who lost an elderly family member
www.shenghong.org.sg/life-point/ | Tel: 6538 9877*

Montfort

*For anyone who has lost a significant person
Email: griefmatters@montfortcare.org.sg | Tel: 8181 0448*

O'Joy Care Services

*For those above 18 in need of grief counselling
www.ojoy.org | Tel: 6749 0190*

SAGE Counselling Centre

*For seniors above 50 or their family/caregivers
www.sagecc.org.sg | Tel: 6354 1191*

Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)

*For those bereaved by suicide or having suicidal thoughts
www.sos.org.sg
Email Befriending: pat@sos.org.sg
Tel: 1800 221 4444 (24-hr Hotline)*

Viriya Community Services

*For those who lost someone from a chronic medical condition
www.viriya.org.sg
Tel: 6285 8033 (by appointment only)*

Wicare Support Group

*For widows and their children
www.wicare.org.sg | Tel: 6354 2475*



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