



COPING WITH GRIEF FOR MILITARY & VETERAN FAMILIES

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COURSE PROGRESS

Lesson 1. What is Grief?

Lesson 2. How Grief may Affect the Veteran or Service Member

Lesson 2. How Grief may Affects the Military Family

Lesson 4. Processing Grief & Coping Techniques

Lesson 5. Community Grief Support Resources



UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRIEF RESPONSE

Sadness or depression- This can be brought on at the realization of the loss and may cause you to isolate yourself whilst reflecting on things you did with your loved one or focusing on memories from the past.

Shock, denial or disbelief- It is natural for our minds to try to protect us from pain, so following a loss some people may find that they feel quite numb about what has happened. Shock provides emotional protection from becoming overwhelmed, especially during the early stages of grief, and it can last a long time.

Numbness and denial- You may find that you feel numb after a loss. This is natural and helps us to process what has happened at a pace that we can manage, and not before we are ready. It is natural and can be a helpful stage - the only problem being if numbness is the only thing we feel, and none of the other feelings associated with grief, as this can cause us to feel 'stuck' or 'frozen'.

Panic and confusion- Following the loss of someone close to us we can be left wondering how we will fill the gap left in our lives, and can experience a sense of changed identity.

Anger or hostility- Losing somebody is painful and can seem an unfair thing to happen. You may find that you feel angry or frustrated and want to find something or someone to blame for the loss, so that you can try to make sense of it.

Feeling overwhelmed- Grief can hit people immediately and with full force, potentially causing them to cry a lot or feel like they are not coping. People can worry that their feelings are so overwhelming that they don't know how they can live with them. But over time feelings of grief tend to become less intense and people find a way to live with them.

Relief- You may feel relieved when somebody dies, especially if there had been a long illness, if the person who died had been suffering, if you were acting as the main care taker for the person, or if your relationship with the person was difficult. Relief is a normal response and does not mean you did not love or care for the person.

Mixed feelings- All relationships have their difficulties and you may think that, because you had a difficult relationship with the person, that you will grieve less or cope better. Instead you may find that you feel a mix of emotions like sadness, anger, guilt and anything in between.

MYTHS ABOUT GRIEF

Myths and facts about grief and grieving

Myth: The pain will go away faster if you ignore it

Fact: Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will only make it worse in the long run. For real healing, it is necessary to face your grief and actively deal with it.

Myth: It's important to "be strong" in the face of loss.

Fact: Feeling sad, frightened, or lonely is a normal reaction to loss. Crying doesn't mean you are weak. You don't need to "protect" your family or friends by putting on a brave front. Showing your true feelings can help them and you.

Myth: If you don't cry, it means you aren't sorry about the loss.

Fact: Crying is a normal response to sadness, but it's not the only one. Those who don't cry may feel the pain just as deeply as others. They may simply have other ways of showing it.

Myth: Grieving should last about a year.

Fact: There is no specific time frame for grieving. How long it takes differs from person to person.

Myth: Moving on with your life means forgetting about your loss.

Fact: Moving on means you've accepted your loss—but that's not the same as forgetting. You can move on with your life and keep the memory of someone or something you lost as an important part of you. In fact, as we move through life, these memories can become more and more integral to defining the people we are.

MYTHS ABOUT GRIEF

GRIEF DOESN'T HAVE A TIMELINE.

PLEASE DON'T FEEL YOU HAVE TO "GET OVER IT."

YET, ALL GRIEVERS DO FEEL AT SOME POINT THEY WERE EXPECTED TO MOVE ON. BUT WHEN? WHY?

GRIEF WAS ALLOWED AT THE HOSPITAL.

GRIEF WAS ALLOWED AT THE FUNERAL.

GRIEF WAS ALLOWED IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED.

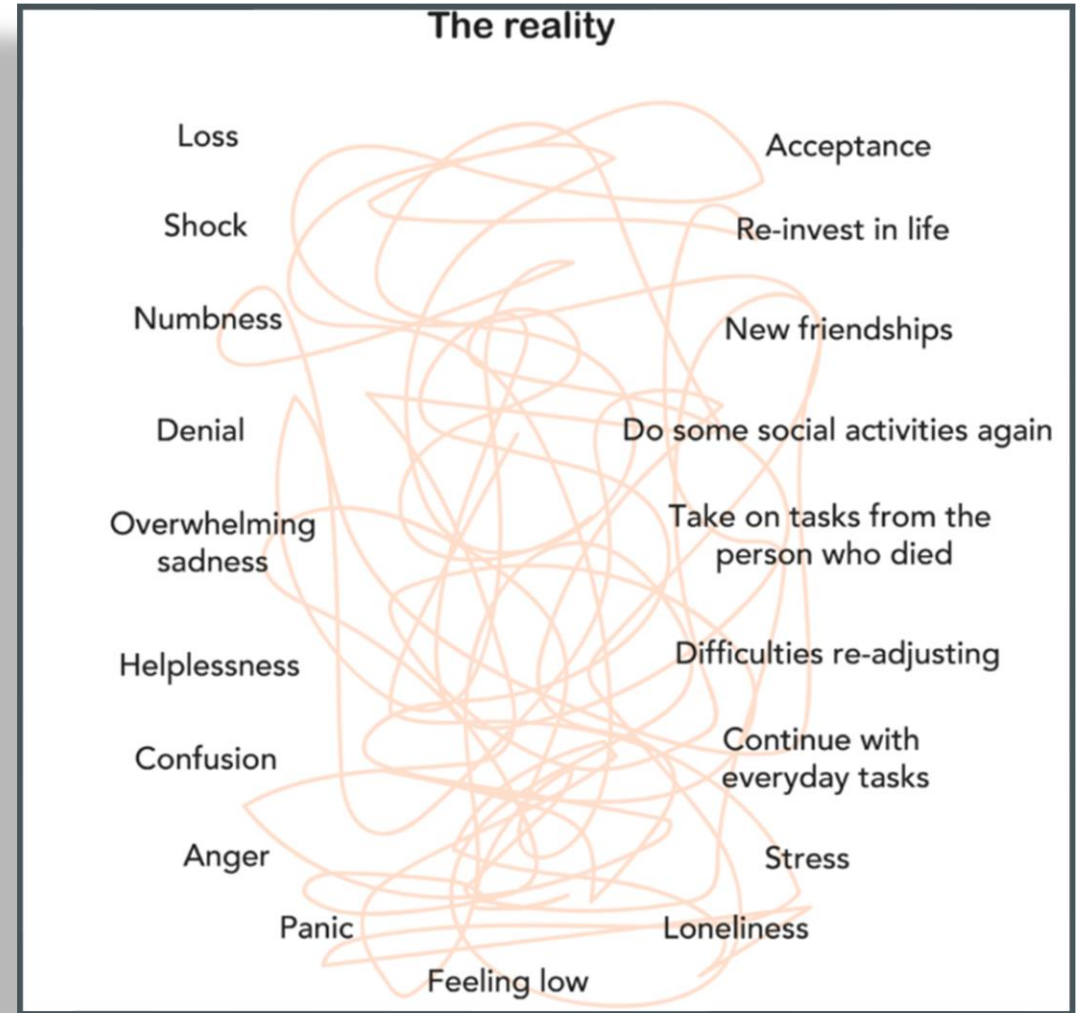
BUT WHEN WAS THE DAY YOUR GRIEF WAS NO LONGER ACCEPTED? IT'S UNFAIR THAT AFTER A COUPLE MONTHS OR EVEN ONE YEAR, PEOPLE THINK YOU'VE MOVED ON. IT'S UNFAIR BECAUSE GRIEF DOESN'T HAVE A TIMELINE. **GRIEF CHANGES WITH TIME.** GRIEF DOES

NOT ALWAYS LOOK LIKE INITIAL LOSS, BUT YOU'LL STILL FEEL IT. MAYBE IN WAVES. AND THAT'S NORMAL.

IT'S NORMAL TO MISS LOVED ONES. IT'S NORMAL TO GRIEVE. IT'S NORMAL TO REMEMBER. IT'S NORMAL TO MOURN. GRIEF DOESN'T HAVE AN END DATE. WE JUST

COPE WITH THE LOSS THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES.

GRIEF THEORIES





GRIEF —vs— LOSS, MOURNING OR BEREAVEMENT

COPING TECHNIQUES FOR ADULTS

Take Care of yourself as you grieve

When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

Face your feelings.

You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.

Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.

Write about your loss in a journal. If you've lost a loved one, write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organization that was important to your loved one.





Try to maintain your hobbies and interests.

There's comfort in routine and getting back to the activities that bring you joy and connect you closer to others can help you come to terms with your loss and aid the grieving process.

Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either.

Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.

COPING TECHNIQUES FOR ADULTS

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Plan ahead for grief “triggers.”

Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it’s completely normal. If you’re sharing a holiday or life cycle event with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on strategies to honor the person you loved.

Look after your physical health.

The mind and body are connected. When you feel healthy physically, you’ll be better able to cope emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Don’t use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially.



COPING TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN WHEN A PARENT DEPLOYS



- Be honest about how you feel.
- Turn off the news.
- Avoid making promises that you cannot keep, such as promising that the loved one will return safely.
- Create a memory box of the time the parent is away with a plan to share the contents with the absent parent upon his or her return from deployment.
- Try a “Worry Doll”. The child tells the doll the worries and lets the doll hold the worries.
- For military deployment and other unpredictable situations, avoid telling children an exact date of return since this can change, even in the last hours.
- Get support from family and friends for yourself. You can’t care for child if you don’t care for yourself.

COPING TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN

- Be patient, your child's grief may make their behavior and needs more challenging, especially when you are managing your own grief at the same time.
- Provide a sense of security, children need to know that there will always be someone to take care of them.
- Tell them your plan for their care if something should happen to you and the other parent.
- Encourage your children to talk with you and express their feelings with drawing, writing, playing, acting, and talking.
- Pay attention to what your child is communicating through their words and behaviors.
- Watch out for reminders. Keep an eye out for military-related reminders such as another person in uniform, which may trigger your child.





- Plan activities that the child can anticipate with excitement.
- Ask what they are hearing from other children.
- Support your child in maintaining a connection to the person who died. Sharing stories, photos, and memories can help your child keep the person who died an ongoing part of his or her life and identity. However, as you share memories, follow and respect your child's lead.
- Provide explanations, even the youngest child needs an explanation of what has happened and be prepared to repeat it.
- Keep other important adults informed of what your child is experiencing.
- Be an advocate for your child at school. Discuss the impact of the death on the child with important school staff, caregivers and teachers.

COPING TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN



- Promote involvement. Participation in a project or organization that helps others will allow your child to feel needed and connected. Doing something as a family to honor the deceased's interests affirms life and can help counteract feelings of helplessness.
- Form peer support groups or play groups with other Gold Star families. Children want to feel normal and to know that they are not alone.
- If you have more than one child, be sure to spend one-on-one time with each child in the family so no one feels left out and everyone feels special.
- Consider the differing needs of children who are bereaved at different ages.
- Help your child over time. As time goes by and your child becomes older, new situations will stir up grief reactions.

COPING TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN

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