



10 things you should know about grief

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1 Grief is about LOSS, not death alone. We need to allow people going through all kinds of personal problems, disappointments, hurts and life-changing events to have their grief. No point in saying, 'there are others worse off' – when you're experiencing your own unwanted or unexpected life event, you can only feel your own pain. It's valid. It's normal. It's called 'grief'.

2 One loss usually triggers a whole lot more. I often liken it to a jigsaw puzzle – when one piece goes missing the whole puzzle is affected and isn't held together anymore. It doesn't look the same anymore. So, when one piece of your life is changed or is "lost", other pieces like companionship, finances, friendships, holidays, mealtimes, outings, family gatherings, daily routines, and a whole lot more ... all change too. Learning to adapt to these changes is sometimes called your 'grief work' – and only you can do this work for yourself.

3 Grief doesn't come in neat, consecutive stages. In fact, there's not much about grief that's neat at all. It comes in waves, sometimes so strong that you think you're drowning in emotions. They may be scary, unfamiliar, keep you awake and stop you from eating. Many people worry and think they're going crazy. Don't expect it to be a smooth road, it just isn't.

4 People may be quite uncomfortable around you. Even people you know well may not know what to say or say things that surprise you or make you mad. They think they have to cheer you up or offer you some wise words. Maybe a silent hug would be better.

5 Time does NOT heal. It just moves on. It's what you do with your time that creates the healing. Doing nothing doesn't make your grief go away. You can't avoid it. You can't hide from it. You need to go 'with it'. You don't get 'over it', you just adapt. And this takes a lot of time.

6 Grief changes you. A significant loss will always affect your life to such an extent that things, and you, will be different. Remember the jigsaw puzzle. So don't expect to be your old self again – grieving requires you to learn new ways of coping, learn new skills, and learn to live without someone who meant so much.

7 There will be 'Why's?' and 'What if's?' Accept that some things will never make sense to you and even if you get answers, they still don't make things right or fair. The trick is to learn to live without the answers.

8 Crying is coping. It just makes others feel awkward so they often urge you to be strong and think of all your happy memories. Crying is okay and not crying is okay. But it's said that crying with someone has a better effect on you than crying alone!

9 'Closure' is an odd concept. It's not realistic to ask someone to 'close off' their love for someone - like you would close a bank account or close a door. These days, we say that finding ways to keep the bonds of love connected are more akin to healthy grieving.

10 A lot of people might come to the funeral. But it doesn't mean you'll have a lot of support. It doesn't take long before the phone stops ringing and people don't drop in. Sometimes it's because they think you have your family around or other friends will be there for you. But the truth is, the time after a funeral can be very lonely and isolating and many people avoid you because they don't know what to say. They do care, but they feel uncomfortable.

Doris Zagdanski is a leading figure in modern day grief and loss education. Her seminars are included in vocational qualifications in Allied Health, Counselling and Funeral Directing. This Factsheet is used with permission from 'Stuck For Words'. Her books and free factsheets are available at www.allaboutgrief.com.