

Coping *with* Grief



The
CHRISTI CENTER
Always Here After Your Loss

THE EXPERIENCE OF GRIEF

Most people are not prepared for the grief journey, which at times can be devastating, frightening, and lonely. It may also seem as though there is no respite, and no end to the intense feelings that you experience.

The grief journey has been compared to enduring a fierce storm at sea. The waves are peaked and close together. Eventually the sea becomes calmer, but occasionally the storm regroups, strengthening without warning. For several hours, days, or weeks, you may not experience grief; then grief resumes. At times it may seem as though you are taking one step forward and two steps back. You may think, do and say things that are very uncharacteristic. You are not alone in feeling this way.

People who are grieving have some experiences in common, but they also experience grief uniquely. Although grief is a universal experience, no two people grieve alike - even within the same family. Different losses can each be grieved differently, even by the same person. Like a fingerprint, each person's grief experience has characteristics all its own. Just as there are no instructions on how to grieve, there is no timetable we can follow. You will adjust to a new life, taking it one day at a time.

Grief is often compounded by the stigma and discomfort surrounding death. Even well-meaning people in your life may want you to "get better" or "get over it." You may feel pressure to suppress your grief instead of acknowledging it as a natural and necessary process. Your life is forever changed so you will not "get over it". But you can find hope for healing, new meaning, and a new normal in your life after the death of a loved one.

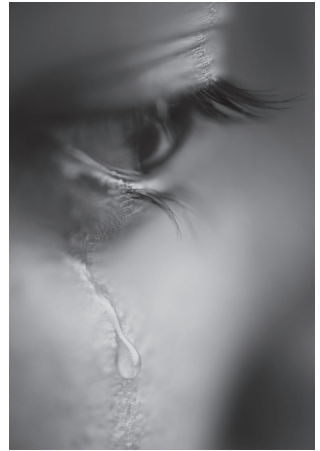


COMMON RESPONSES TO GRIEF

While grief is a typical response to the death of a loved one, it sometimes causes reactions that can be unlike your normal behavior. These responses are understandable and do not indicate “insanity.” Pain may surface in the following forms:

Emotional

- Shock and disbelief
- Sadness and yearning
- Numbness
- Feeling disorganized or confused
- Wanting to be alone and yet feeling lonely
- Resentment towards those who have not experienced loss
- Anxiety, worry and fear
- Feelings of guilt or sense of failure
- Helplessness/hopelessness
- Irritability and anger at:
 - The situation
 - Others
 - Your loved one who died
 - God/your higher power
 - Medical personnel



Physical

- Change in sleep that may include bad dreams/nightmares
- Change in eating habits
- Pain with unknown causes – headaches, stomach problems, muscle pain, etc.
- Fatigue/lack of energy
- Sexual difficulties

Behavioral

- Lack of motivation
- Difficulty concentrating and/or remembering things
- Crying often
- Emotional outbursts
- Isolating self or avoiding others
- Abusing substances including alcohol, prescription medication, or street drugs as a way to cope
- Unnecessary risk taking

These are all common experiences of grief and may take an immense amount of energy to confront. If left unresolved through avoidance

Although the world is full of suffering, it is

or denial, they can lead to prolonged or complicated grief. This in turn can significantly impact your health, marriage, friendships, job, or other areas of your life. Sharing with those who are on a similar journey is often a helpful way to recognize and avoid falling into a pattern of complicated grief and to begin to find a new normal.



If you are concerned about the number or intensity of your reactions, you may find it helpful to consult a professional who can help you in your grief journey. To help you find this support, we can provide you with a referral list.

COPING WITH GRIEF

Each grief and healing process is unique, and people cope with grief in many different ways. Here are a few things that might help you:

Accept Support

Seek out support and help from friends, family, support groups, professionals, or religious leaders. People may ask you, “What can I do?” or “tell me what you need”. Make a list and when the occasion arises, find someone who is able to provide the type of support you need (just being there, listening, talking, socializing, etc.) When someone offers you help, don’t be afraid to accept it.

Be Active

It can be helpful to schedule activities or make plans to have something to look forward to. Remember that you are healing and in doing so, you are allowed to have enjoyment in your life.

- **Exercise** - Can improve your overall health, mood/energy level, sleep quality, and is a safe way to release emotions.
- **Volunteer** - Do something to help others - in doing so you can often help yourself.
- **Socialize** - Share a meal with friends or spend time with others who have also experienced a loss.
- **Yoga** - Can help calm your mind with meditation and active practice.
- **Gardening** - Provides benefits such as relaxation, exercise, meditation, and connecting with nature.

We offer ongoing opportunities to participate in these activities at The Christi Center. Please contact us or visit our website for a current list of activities.

Self-Care

Be kind to yourself and do things you enjoy. Rediscover past interests or learn something new.

- **Read** - There are many helpful books on grief and loss. You could also find quotes or poems that are helpful to you. The Christi Center has a resource library filled with many books that our clients have found helpful in the grief journey and shared with us. You are welcome to stop by and borrow materials even if you do not attend groups at the Center.
- **Journal** - It may be helpful to reflect on thoughts and feelings to increase understanding of your grief reactions.
- **Health** - Adequate sleep and nutrition are important for healing.

Commemorate

Many people find comfort in staying connected to loved ones by honoring their memory. There are many ways you can do this:

- Pass on an heirloom of your loved one.
- Plant a tree or other living monument.
- Try a new creative activity for a memorial such as; making a quilt, mosaic, painting, sculpture, stain glass, etc. that allows you to create a memory of your loved one.
- Create a memory box filled with objects representing your loved one.
- Collect favorite stories about your loved one and put them into a book.
- Write a blog or develop a memorial page/website.
- Put your online photos in a slideshow with their favorite songs or songs that mean something to you on your grief journey.
- Make a playlist of your loved ones favorite songs.
- Enjoy your loved one's favorite food.
- Write or say a toast, meditation or a prayer for your loved one.
- Write a letter to your loved one.
- Light a candle in their memory.

The Christi Center hosts an annual holiday Remembrance Service in addition to memorial opportunities at the Center. Contact us for more information. You can also visit and subscribe to our blog at www.christicenter.org to read more about how others commemorate their loved ones.

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHILE GRIEVING

Grief is hard work.

The expression “grief work” is very true. Working through the experience of grief may be the hardest work that you will ever do, but you can find healing.

Understanding is essential to healing.

The expression of grief is essential for good emotional and physical health, even though it may be painful and difficult. There is no way under, over, or around your grief. Although grief may hurt, you must go through it. Emotions are ever changing and it is important to allow them to move through you.

Avoid major decisions.

You should avoid making major decisions (such as moving, changing jobs, etc.) unless absolutely necessary during the early stages of grief when judgment is cloudy.

Grief has no timetable.

Grief is a journey and the length is different for everyone. It helps to take life one minute, one hour and one day at a time.

You will heal.

People have a natural inclination to heal. But be patient with yourself - healing from grief takes time.



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP A GRIEVING PERSON

Grieving people need love, patience, and ongoing support. Often times, there is an outpouring of support immediately after the loss and then everyone goes back to life as normal, while the grieving person is left alone to figure out their new normal - without their loved one. There are lots of things family and friends can do to support people throughout their grief journey.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Mathew 5:4

Be Present

The presence of a friend or family member is worth more than words. People often question or feel uncomfortable about what to say to a grieving person. There is no one right thing to say and sometimes the best thing you can offer is just letting them know that you are there whether to talk, sit, cry, yell or simply be silent. Do not avoid a grieving person because of your own discomfort. You do not need to say anything profound. Just showing up and sitting with the griever is helpful.



Listen

The bereaved sometimes just want to be asked and talk about the person who died, as well as their memories and feelings about what happened. Be there to listen. Using the loved one's name can be comforting, because it lets the grieving person know nothing is off-limits.

Reach Out

Keep in touch with those who have lost loved ones by calling, visiting, sending cards and including them in activities. Often, people tell a grieving person to “call if you need anything”, but remember that those in grief are often too overwhelmed to know what they need. Checking in periodically and offering specific services that they may need, such as mowing the lawn, cooking meals, bringing the kids to school, etc. will relieve them of the burden of making the request.

Acknowledge the Right to Grieve

Allow the bereaved to express a whole range of emotions. They may not want to cry, or need to cry. Anger, resentment, and anxiety are also common reactions. Be accepting and supportive of changing moods without judgement.

Comfort with a Touch

If appropriate, the emotional strength of a good hug can do wonders. Always be aware of what form of touch is appropriate for each person. The touch of a hand, a pat on the back or a hug can all be meaningful ways to show you care.

WHAT TO SAY TO A GRIEVING PERSON

Sometimes when people are trying to be helpful or are unsure what to say to a grieving person, they make statements that are not helpful. These types of comments can dismiss the emotions associated with grief. It is okay for a grieving person to feel a whole range of emotions, and it is important to acknowledge them. Since each person grieves differently, there is no one right thing to say or do, but consider the following:

Common well-intentioned remarks	Why they're not helpful	Alternatives to consider
Saying nothing at all.	This is actually one of the worst things you can do because it ignores the grieving person's pain.	I'm not sure what to say, but I want you know I'm here for you.
It was God's will, God will never give you more than you can handle, maybe God is trying to teach you something, God needed an angel, God needs him/her more than you do, etc.	Even if the person's faith includes God, they are relying on their own perception of faith or may even be struggling to reconcile loss and faith. Don't complicate things by presuming to know God's intentions.	This must be so hard for you. It's hard to understand why these things happen.
I know just how you feel.	Even if you've experienced a loss, each person's loss is different so you can't know exactly how the person feels.	I can only imagine how you feel. Can you tell me more?

One joy shatters a hundred griefs

Chinese Proverbs quotes

Common well-intentioned remarks	Why they're not helpful	Alternatives to consider
He/she wouldn't have wanted you to be sad.	Sadness and anger are difficult enough. Don't introduce guilt into the grief process.	I can see you are sad and you miss him/her so much.
It has been three weeks/months/years since he/she died. Aren't you over it yet?	You never really "get over" a death. The pain subsides and you begin to heal. The timeframe for this is different for every person, so do not impose timeframes.	I'll be here for as long as you need me.
He/she lived a good, full life and it was his/her time to die.	Knowing that someone lived a full life does not make it any easier to say goodbye.	He/She will be missed.
You should be grateful for your other children, You'll get married again, etc.	One person cannot replace another. Making these statements discount the unique love they have for each individual.	I can tell how much you loved him/her.

Common well-intentioned remarks	Why they're not helpful	Alternatives to consider
He's in a better place, Just be happy he isn't in pain anymore, You must have some sense of relief after his long illness, etc.	The grieving person wants their loved one to be in their life, and their absence is felt heavily.	You must miss him terribly.
You need to be strong for your children, spouse, etc.	Hiding emotions is not helpful to anyone's grief process. It's ok to model normal grief for others who are grieving, too.	How are your kids/spouse doing with this?
You need to move on, You should stay busy, You should _____.	Each grief journey is different. It is not your place to suggest timetables or activities that would make the bereaved feel better.	Do what you need to do to grieve - I'll support you however I can.
Call me if you need anything.	Knowing what they need or asking for help may be overwhelming for a grieving person. Make specific suggestions and ask for permission to help.	Today looks like it is a hard day for you. Can I bring dinner by for you at 5? Today is garbage day. Is it ok if I take your trash to the curb? I know you have a lot going on. Could I pick up the kids afterschool and take them to the park for awhile?

HOW WE CAN HELP

For over 30 years, we have been connecting people grieving the death of a loved one with others who have experienced a similar loss through peer-based support groups. We offer open ended-support and a respect for grieving in your own way and on your own timeframe. Our support groups include:

Adults

- Loss of a child
- Loss of a spouse
- Adult mixed loss (siblings, parents, other relatives, friends)
- Loss to suicide
- Loss to overdose
- Crime victims/loss to violent crime
- Men's group
- Mother's group
- Loss of spouse second stage/"Moving On"
- Williamson County group at Georgetown Community Resource Center
- Women and men in substance abuse recovery at Austin Recovery Center
- Young adults group

Kids

Kids Who Kare helps grieving children and their families by providing:

- Semi-monthly groups in Austin for Kids (5-12) with concurrent groups for parents/guardians
- Semi-monthly groups for teens (13-19)
- 8-12 week grief groups onsite at schools
- Individual counseling in select schools
- Retreats

in the Community

We help professionals and people in the community understand how grief can impact every area of a person's life. About one in ten people will experience unresolved or complicated grief, which is a very real and potentially devastating mental health issue. To promote awareness and early intervention, we offer:



- Information/referral
- Training and presentations on grief and bereavement
- A Healing Garden at the Center
- Annual holiday Remembrance Service
- Second Stage Mondays, a monthly series exploring healing activities and grief topics

Our mission is to offer hope after the death of a loved one by providing support networks, community education and therapeutic activities that are free, peer-based and ongoing. Our vision is a community where no one has to grieve alone. We're always here for you after your loss.

**Grief drives men into
habits of serious
reflection, sharpens
the understanding, and
softens the heart.**

- John Adams

GROUP SCHEDULE

Please contact The Christi Center at 512-467-2600, prior to attending your first group.

AUSTIN GROUPS

2306 Hancock Dr., Austin, TX 78756

Adults

Mondays, 7:00PM to 9:00PM*

Wednesdays, 11:00AM to 1:00PM

*2nd Mondays of the month a variety of healing workshops are offered. Call or check the website for this month's topic.

Young Adults

2nd and 4th Thursdays, 6:30PM to 8:00PM

Crime Victims

2nd and 4th Tuesdays, 6:30PM to 9:00PM

Loss of a Loved One to Suicide

Tuesdays, 6:30PM to 8:30PM

Loss to Overdose

1st Tuesdays, 6:30pm to 8:00pm

Kids Who Kare (Age 5-12)

(Concurrent group for parents/guardians)

2nd and 4th Wednesdays, 6:30PM to 8:00PM

Pregnancy & Infant Loss Group

1st and 3rd Tuesdays, 6:30PM to 8:00PM

Teens (Age 13-19)

1st and 3rd Thursdays, 6:30PM to 8:00PM

Spanish Language Adults

1st and 3rd Mondays, 7:00PM-9:00PM

GEORGETOWN GROUPS

Georgetown Community Resource Center
805 W. University Avenue, Georgetown, TX 78626

Adults

1st, 3rd and 4th Mondays, 7:00PM to 9:00PM

2nd and 4th Wednesdays, 11:00AM to 1:00PM

Loss of a Loved One to Suicide

1st and 3rd Mondays, 7:00PM to 9:00PM



Sorrow
makes us
all children
again—
destroys all
differences of
intellect. The
wisest know
nothing.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

When you become a member of a support group at The Christi Center, you can expect the following:

MEMBER BILL OF RIGHTS

- You have the right to responsible facilitation that keeps in mind the best interest of each individual and the group as a whole.
- You have the right to be free from financial obligations for peer support group services at The Christi Center.
- You have the right to know that your personal information and everything you share in group will be kept confidential by The Christi Center staff and facilitators unless someone suspects you are a danger to yourself or others, or if someone is hurting you.
- You have the right to know your group will be structured to end on time.
- You have the right to excuse yourself if you need to leave.
- You have the right to an appropriate amount of time to share in group.
- You have the right and responsibility to be an active member in your group. This can be in the form of sharing about your loss, listening actively, or learning from and supporting peers in your group.
- You have the right to know you are accepted and respected at The Christi Center for who you are regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other beliefs.
- You have the right to know that there is no single right way to grieve.
- You have the right to know that we do not judge based on the relationship of loss or how you lost your loved one.
- You have the right to raise questions or concerns to a Christi Center staff member about your experience here.
- You have the right to be referred to other resources if you have needs that cannot be met by the services offered at The Christi Center.

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This Committee is comprised of clinicians from various disciplines and is responsible for assessing publications and trainings to support best practices in bereavement and peer support services.

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About The Christi Center

On October 26, 1985 Susan and Don Cox's lives were altered in an instant when a drunk driver killed their 20-year old daughter, Christi. Following her death, the Coxes and their 16-year old son, Sean Lanahan, found few affordable support options available to help them through their grief. They found their best source of support was others who had also experienced a loss. The family realized that not only did they need help navigating their new life without Christi, but there were many others in the community who had lost loved ones who also needed help. Two years later, in October of 1987, they established a nonprofit called For the Love of Christi (later renamed The Christi Center) to offer hope after the death of a loved one by providing support networks, community education and therapeutic activities that are free, peer-based and ongoing.

To join one of our support groups, please call us at 512-467-2600.

To learn more about us, visit us online at

www.christicenter.org

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