

A GUIDE TO Grief, Loss & Healing

EveryStep 

Grief & Loss Services

Home of Amanda the Panda



A GUIDE TO

Grief, Loss & Healing

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What is Grief?

What is Grief?

The definition of grief includes: emotions and sensations that accompany the loss of someone or something dear to you. The English word comes from the Old French *greve*, meaning a heavy burden. This makes sense when you consider that grief often weighs you down with sorrow and other emotions that can have both psychological and physical consequences. Grief is a normal and natural reaction to the death of a loved one. Most of us are not prepared for a long journey of grief which is sometimes devastating, frightening, and often lonely. We may think, do, and say things that are very unlike us. There seems to be no end to the intense feelings that we experience. Grief has been likened to a raw open wound. With great care it eventually will heal, but there will always be a scar. Life will never be the same but eventually your grief will soften. Grief has its common and its unique sides. Although it is a universal experience, no two people grieve the same, even in the same family. Like a fingerprint, each person's grief has characteristics all its own.

When someone close to you dies, you don't just lose that person on the physical level, you also face the loss of what might have been. Your pain can involve missing that person's presence; sleeping in a bed that's half empty, craving a scent or an embrace. But knowing that your loved one will miss all of the milestones in your life often lasts longer than the pain of the physical absence. This may include the children that were never born, the trips not taken, colleges not attended, weddings not danced at. Every life marker can be a reminder and an occasion for renewed grief.

The elements of grief have 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 any warning. For several hours, days, or weeks you may not feel grief, then suddenly you meet someone or see something, or hear something, and grief resumes. It seems as if you are taking one step forward and two back.

- **Emotional** responses can vary when someone dies. Shock, anger, sadness, yearning, guilt, and relief are some of the types of emotional responses.
- **Physical** responses can also vary when we experience grief. Fatigue, headache, stomach problems, lack of focus, memory loss, sleeping disorders, and eating disorders are some types of physical responses. Intense symptoms lessen over time.
- **Behavioral** responses include having dreams of the deceased, socially withdrawing, crying, avoiding reminders of the deceased, and inability to initiate and maintain activities.
- **Cognitive** responses include disbelief, pre-occupation with certain thoughts, confusion, and concentration difficulty.
- **Spiritual** responses can also be an element of grief with a loss in faith and belief systems, or questioning faith/beliefs.

Concepts about Grief:

Grief Work: The expression "grief work" is very true. It may be the hardest work that you will ever perform. It is draining.

- **Long-lasting** - We never "get over" the death of someone we loved. We learn over the years to create a new normal, a life without them. This can't be rushed and shouldn't be judged by others. The second year of grief may be surprisingly harder than the first. Grief often takes much longer than the bereaved or the people in their lives expect.
- **Challenging** - grief can make it hard to focus, sleep, or have enough energy to get through the day.
- **Control** - We CANNOT control the feelings that arise within us. These feelings come from deep inside, but we can choose what we do with them. We can accept or reject them. To deny only prolongs our grief. Remember, what we do determines whether we remain in our grief or survive. Feelings are not bad or wrong. They should be recognized and faced honestly.
- **Major Decisions** - It is strongly suggested not to make major decisions (such as moving, money matters, etc.) unless absolutely necessary during the early stages of grief when judgment is cloudy.

- **Affects our mental health** - Can cause temporary anxiety or depression or just a general lack of joy.
- **Requires coping skills** - talking, crying, or journaling. Needs a healthy release such as physical activity, music, being with pets or friends. Different strategies work for different people.
- **Listeners** - Find someone who will listen. Talking is therapy.
- **Causes stress** - Can increase unhealthy coping skills such as alcohol and drug abuse or increase risk of self-harm. Counseling or peer support groups can help greatly and even lessen the severity of our grief.
- **Will get easier** - With time and the love and support of those we trust to share our grief with. Will happen to each and every human during their lifetime and causes us to appreciate life even more.

Differences in grieving styles can be impacted by:

How the person died

Your response to an unanticipated death – a sudden heart attack, an accident, and act of violence – may be very different from the grief you feel when someone you love dies after a long illness. In the latter case, you may experience anticipatory grief, which occurs before the person's death.

You're just as devastated when the death happens, but because you started grieving earlier, you may be able to recover sooner.

Your relationship with the person

The closeness of the relationship - spouse, parent, sibling, and child - plays a role, of course. In the case of a blood relative, another factor is whether the person was a daily or regular presence in your life. Then there's the psychological nature of the relationships; was it smooth or rocky? If you had unfinished emotional business with the person you lost, if your last interaction was angry or otherwise fraught, that can intensify your experience of grief.

Your personality and coping style

If you're a normally resilient person, you may feel just as much pain over a loss as someone whose normal state is depressive or emotionally vulnerable, but you may find it easier to recover your equilibrium and to enjoy life again. People who have trouble coping with the setbacks of daily life will have a more difficult time recovering from a serious personal loss.

Your life experience

What you've learned about loss from other people and from your own experience can inform how you handle the loss of someone you love.

Support from others

It's essential that you have people in your life who will help sustain you emotionally as you grieve. It's also important that your friends and family take your loss as seriously as you do. If you lose a cousin or friend who was more like a sibling, your grief shouldn't be dismissed as less important than that of an immediate relative. Many people downplay miscarriage, even if, to the parents, it represents the death of a baby. Nor does it matter how old the person was who died, or how sick. You lost someone you love, it hurts, and you need the support of people who care about you.

Oftentimes, when people hear the word “grief,” they instantly associate it with death. Though death-related grief is very significant, there are many other losses that can result in grieving. People are oftentimes hard on themselves for feeling grief over things that aren’t death-related (i.e. “It could be much worse.”) but grief from secondary losses is still very impactful and valid.

What is Secondary Loss?

Secondary loss involves any sort of loss that is not death-related but still brings grief. The impact of these losses are oftentimes underestimated and therefore not fully tended to. Examples of these secondary losses may be:

- Divorce
- Loss of physical or mental health
- Loss of career
- Loss of a relationship
- Loss of a safe home
- Loss of financial stability
- Loss of trust (from others or for others)
- Loss of control
- Loss of time
- Loss of memories
- Loss of sobriety
- Loss of parental rights
- Loss of respect for self/others
- Loss of independence
- Loss of having to set a boundary
- Loss of being able to get closure/validation
- Loss of say in what happens to your body
- Loss of feeling like you belong
- Loss of feeling like things will turn out okay
- Loss of opportunity to define and follow values
- Loss of life you used to know
- Loss of protection
- Loss of innocence
- Loss of being loved how you would like to be loved

Regardless of the type of loss you are experiencing, your grief is real. Please place extra priority on taking care of yourself and being easy on how you’re feeling. All you can do is take things one day at a time and to be patient

with yourself. You cannot rush grief. Grief needs an outlet in order to heal, even if it is painful to feel each emotion. Pain is a part of the healing process, so letting sadness and anger in is a step towards healing. You are never at a standstill.

Some common reactions towards loss are:

- Feelings of loneliness/isolation
- Desire to be alone/ reducing communication towards the outside world
- Restlessness, sleep challenges, difficulty concentrating
- Guilt
- Loss of control of feelings, feeling like you’re “losing your mind”
- Anger towards yourself/others
- Anxiety, may feel constant
- Exhaustion

It is important to know that these are all normal reactions to grief. It is okay if these feelings change suddenly, or feel more extreme at some points than others.

Taking care of yourself during grief, what does it look like? As mentioned earlier, caring for yourself during grief makes all the difference. During these challenging times, your body may be more susceptible to feelings of stress and fatigue. Implementing proper sleep and nutrition can restore your body and help prevent stress-related health issues. Taking quality time for yourself and surrounding yourself with positive outlets is also very helpful.

Some concluding tips when grieving a loss:

Name and validate your own emotions. Taking time to recognize your loss and the emotions that come with it is an important first step in coping with secondary loss. What you are feeling is real and valid. You are not choosing to feel these hard emotions, and they are necessary and crucial for the healing process. You are not weak or sensitive.

Be kind to yourself. During this time you are being dealt some immense challenges. Give yourself the amazing love you give to others. You deserve to prioritize your feelings during this time. It is not selfish, rather healthy and imperative. You deserve to root for yourself, just as you would to those around you.

Remind yourself of that which makes you grateful.

This is not to undermine the hardships you are currently going through, but to help as a reminder that there is some light in your life, too. Touching base with those who make you happy or getting involved in things that feel fulfilling to you may help to promote feelings of joy.

Engage in positive self-talk. If one of your loved ones was going through a loss, what types of things would you say to them? Would you think that they are selfish, sensitive, or over-reacting? Probably not. You don't deserve to hear these things from yourself, either. It is easy to get in a rut of negative self-talk. This is a normal reaction, but you deserve your own nurturing words during this time. If you are struggling with negative self-talk, it may be helpful to write down a negative and balance it with a positive. Simply writing these thoughts down can help to gain a different perspective.

Talk to someone who's a good listener. Whether this be a trusted friend or receiving some professional help, talking to someone who will give you their full attention can be very healing. Talking aloud can help to release negative emotions and really help to process how you're feeling in a different light.

Anticipatory Loss

"What's your grief?"

Oftentimes, we think of grief as something that happens following a death. While this type of grief is very real, grief itself can actually begin long before a death occurs. Once the possibility, or likelihood, of death enters our minds, it is natural for our bodies to begin grieving.

What is Anticipatory Loss?

Anticipatory loss involves the grief that comes before a death or great loss. It oftentimes occurs when one is diagnosed with a terminal diagnosis or discovers that death of a loved one is in the near future. There can be many different losses during this time, such as role changes in the family, financial stress, or alterations to what the future was thought to look like. These types of losses are known as secondary losses. Though it may feel wrong to mourn while a loved one is still here, it is completely normal to be experiencing these feelings and grieving during this time.

Secondary Losses

The losses that come before a death oftentimes take a person by surprise. It is so easy to be focused on death itself, but grief can affect many other elements in one's life. Support systems don't often know to acknowledge these other losses, which can lead one to feel very alone in their grief. It is recommended to take time to write about these types of grief, to help get a clear visual on the areas impacting you and help to understand where more help and support may be needed.

Each secondary loss is unique and may look different for each individual. Some of these losses may include:

- loss of person's abilities and independence
- loss of cognition
- loss of hope/future dreams
- loss of stability and security
- loss of identity and our own
- financial insecurity

Secondary loss usually involves non-death related losses. Unfortunately, these losses often go unnoticed, or are overruled by the main loss. It may be helpful to reach out to support groups or receive counseling to ensure you are getting adequate support. You do not have to face these losses by yourself.

Feelings of Relief

One may feel quite fragile during this time period. You may feel more sensitive to noises or constantly worried about little things, such as the phone ringing. This can bring a lot of panic. Due to these stressful circumstances, the death of a loved one may bring feelings of relief. You cared for them and watched their pain. Relief oftentimes brings a lot of guilt. It is important to understand that feelings of relief do not change the deep love you have for that person but are more so a natural reaction. You saw their suffering first-hand and understand that they no longer have to feel pain. These feelings are common and normal.

There are no rules with grief.

It is important to know that there are no rules with grief. It is easy to be hard on yourself that you are feeling too much or not feeling enough. Treat yourself with extra kindness during this time and recognize that grieving is not linear. Anywhere you are with your grief is okay. You are making great strides even if you aren't feeling so.

Things to Remember When coping with Anticipatory Loss:

- 1. Grief before death is normal.** It may feel wrong to be grieving before your loved one has died. It is important to know that it is extremely common and normal to be experiencing this.
- 2. Don't minimize how you're feeling.** Even though your loved one is still alive, it is completely okay to acknowledge all that's going on in your life. You don't need to minimize your pain because your person is still here.

- 3. Use your available support.** When caregiving becomes the number one priority, oftentimes one can feel isolated and lonely. Don't feel guilty for reaching out for support! Communicating openly with your friends and family helps them to figure out how to help you most. Also, getting involved in a support group can help provide a safe space to open up. It can also help to meet people facing similar situations and emotions.
- 4. You are not giving up.** It is common to feel like you have given up when an illness progresses. If you are there for your loved one, you are not giving up. It is easy to feel grief when you don't feel that there's a lot more to do. Focus on what you are doing during this time, and know that just by you being there, you are truly helping your loved one.
- 5. Reflect on the remaining time.** Think of the things that bring you and your loved one joy. Though it may be challenging, it is possible to find meaningful ways to spend time. If they are willing, it may be beneficial to have conversations regarding life after them, and how to fulfill their wishes.
- 6. You must take care of yourself to care for others.** It is so easy to put caring for yourself low on the priority list. It is crucial, though, to check in with yourself before being able to help those around you. Communicate how you are doing to those you love and trust. Self-care looks different for everyone, but it is important to find the things that fulfill you and to do them often. Caring for yourself is not selfish.
- 7. Consider counseling.** It is normal to feel like counseling is only for the severe cases. This is not true! You may find it very helpful to share how you're feeling with an outside resource. Someone who doesn't know your family or situation but is just there to listen.
- 8. It is normal to feel relief.**
- 9. Don't assume.** We all grieve differently, so it is important to know that your grief may not be what you originally anticipated. That is okay. Be kind towards yourself and know that wherever you are on your grief journey is completely normal and okay. You are making great strides.

Helping Yourself Heal When Someone Dies

Alan D. Wolfelt, PH.D.

Someone You Love Has Died

You are now faced with the difficult, but important, need to mourn. Mourning is the open expression of your thoughts and feelings regarding the death and the person who has died. It is an essential part of healing. You are beginning a journey that is often frightening, painful, overwhelming, and sometimes lonely. This article provides practical suggestions to help you move toward healing in your personal grief experience.

Realize Your Grief is Unique

Your grief is unique. No one will grieve in exactly the same way. Your experience will be influenced by a variety of factors: the relationship you had with the person who died; the circumstances surrounding the death; your emotional support system; and your cultural and religious background.

As a result of these factors, you will grieve in your own special way. Don't try to compare your experience with that of other people or to adopt assumptions about just how long your grief should last. Consider taking a "one-day-at-a-time" approach that allows you to grieve at your own pace.

Expect to Feel a Multitude of Emotions

Experiencing loss affects your head, heart, and spirit. So you may experience a variety of emotions as part of your grief work. Confusion, disorganization, fear, guilt, relief, or explosive emotions are just a few of the emotions you may feel. Sometimes these emotions will follow each other within a short period of time. Or they may occur simultaneously.

As strange as some of these emotions may seem, they are normal and healthy. Allow yourself to learn from these feelings. And don't be surprised if out of nowhere you suddenly experience surges of grief, even at the most unexpected times. These grief attacks can be frightening and leave you feeling overwhelmed. They are, however, a natural response to the death of someone loved. Find someone who understands your feelings and will allow you to talk about them.

Allow for Numbness

Feeling dazed or numb when someone dies is often part of your early grief experience. This numbness serves a valuable purpose: it gives your emotions time to catch up with what your mind has told you. This feeling helps create insulation from the reality of the death until you are more able to tolerate what you don't want to believe.

Be Tolerant of Your Physical and Emotional Limits

Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you fatigued. Your ability to think clearly and make decisions may be impaired. And your low-energy level may naturally slow you down. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Nurture yourself. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. Lighten your schedule as much as possible. Caring for yourself doesn't mean feeling sorry for yourself, it means you are using survival skills.

Develop a Support System

Reaching out to others and accepting support is often difficult, particularly when you hurt so much. But the most compassionate self-action you can do at this difficult time is to find a support system of caring friends and relatives who will provide the understanding you need. Find those people who encourage you to be yourself and acknowledge your feelings – both happy and sad.

Make Use of a Ritual

The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. Most importantly, the funeral is a way for you to express your grief outside yourself. If you eliminate this ritual, you often set yourself up to repress your feelings, and you cheat everyone of a chance to pay tribute to someone who was, and always will be, loved.

Embrace Your Spirituality

If faith is part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you are angry at God because of the death of someone you loved, realize this feeling as a normal part of your grief work. Find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

Allow a Search for Meaning

You may find yourself asking, "Why did he die? Why this way? Why now?" This search for meaning is often another normal part of the healing process. Some questions have answers. Some do not. Actually, the healing occurs in the opportunity to pose the questions, not necessarily in answering them. Find a supportive friend who will listen responsively as you search for meaning.

Treasure Your Memories

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after someone loved dies. Treasure them. Share them with your family and friends. Recognize that your memories may make you laugh or cry. In either case, they are a lasting part of the relationship that you had with a very special person in your life.

Move Toward Your Grief and Heal

The capacity to love requires the necessity to grieve when someone loved dies. You cannot heal unless you openly express your grief. Denying your grief will only make it become more confusing and overwhelming. Embrace your grief and heal.

Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself. Never forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever. It's not that you won't be happy again. It's simply that you will never be exactly the same as you were before the death.

The experience of grief is powerful. So, too, is your ability to help yourself heal. In doing the work of grieving, you are moving toward a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in your life.

Tips for Overcoming Stress During Times of Loss

Engage in regular, vigorous aerobic exercise.

Choose an activity you enjoy – walking, running, biking, swimming, etc. – and stick with it! 30 minutes/4 times/week.

Eat a variety of nutritious foods.

Eat a balanced diet which includes fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, dairy products and meat substitutes. Limit your caffeine, sodium and fat consumption. You wouldn't expect your car to run smoothly without proper fuel; the same is true of your body.

Keep a stress diary/listen to your body.

This will pinpoint the specific things that add to your feelings of tension. You can then act to avoid at least some of them.

Practice relaxation exercises.

When you are under stress, your muscles tighten and you feel tense all over. Proper breathing techniques, stretches and muscle relaxation exercises can be beneficial.

Get organized.

Too many of us try to juggle too many tasks at a time. Make a conscious effort to manage your time. Each morning make a realistic list of the day's goals. Start one task and complete it before going on to the next.

Balance work and play/leave your work at the office.

Now and then, all of us must put in overtime or bring work home. But if you find yourself bringing work home almost every night and skipping vacations because of your work, you're inviting more stress. And, you're probably reducing your productivity. Maybe you're trying to do too much or not managing your time well. Analyze your situation and take corrective steps.

Get enough sleep.

Our sleep requirements vary from person to person, but most people need at least 6 or 7 hours to perform at their peak. Be aware of this most basic need.

Set aside personal time.

All of us need time and space to be by ourselves, doing what we want to do. This may be walking your dog, playing the piano or other instrument, handiwork, anything you like to do that is relaxing.

Develop a support network of caring people around you.

We all need friends! Cherish those you already have and begin to make some of your acquaintances closer friends.

Responses to Grief and Loss

Things that are Helpful to Say or Do

- Share favorite memories you have of your loved one or how they impacted your life. "The thing I'll remember the most about John was his contagious laugh." "Mary was my mentor and helped me in many ways."
- A simple "I'm sorry." With a long hug or hand holding. Being comfortable with silence and just listening without commenting.
- Specific practical offers, rather than "call me if you need anything." Schedule a night to bring dinner, offer to bring over stamps and write a stack of thank you notes, mow the yard, or drive the kids to activities.
- Regular check-ins. "How did you survive today?" Especially on special occasions such as the anniversary of the death or their birthday. Send cards. The second year may be even harder than the first.
- Continued invitations to social gatherings, without any expectation to stay the entire event. Keep asking, even if the answer is often "Not today."

THINGS TO AVOID:

Asking general questions, such as "How are you doing?"

INSTEAD:

Be specific. "How are you eating?", "How are you sleeping?", "How is ____ class going?", "What are you doing for fun?", "What helps right now?", "What do you think about when you think of ____?"

Commenting: "You shouldn't feel that way."

"Tell me how that feels."

Offering religious answers. Your beliefs may not be theirs.

"What do you believe?"

Minimizing their pain. "I know just how you feel. When my father died, I ..."

Meet them where they are.
"Right now it doesn't feel like it's going to get better."

Putting them on a timetable for recovery... you can't fix this for them.

You can be there for them.
"I'll be here as long as you need me."

Avoiding due to discomfort

Be present.

The truth is most of us have said the wrong thing to a grieving person at one time or another. It may help to remember that saying the perfect thing to a griever doesn't have the magical power to take away their pain any more than saying the wrong thing will scar them forever. What people always remember is if we showed up and left them with a feeling of compassion.

Appropriate Grief Responses from Children:

- Feels sadness mixed with anger, sometimes directed at themselves/ feels sadness but can switch to more normal moods in the same day
- May consistently feel tired, lose their appetite, or have trouble sleeping; may be hyperactive or aggressive (masking depression)/ has changeable moods, activity levels, appetite and sleep patterns
- Expresses anger in the form of rage or denies being angry all together/ expresses anger at appropriate times even if not in appropriate ways
- May not recall dreams, and fantasizes infrequently/ dreams and fantasizes, particularly about the loss
- May see themselves as bad and worthless; is preoccupied with themselves/ may blame themselves for somehow not preventing the death, is preoccupied with the loss
- May be unresponsive to others or responds to pressure and urging/ responds to warmth and reassurance
- Is rarely able to enjoy pleasure/ is able to experience pleasure at varying times

A grieving child, like a grieving adult, will experience some degree of depression. **However, when the signs of depression seem to be prolonged, excessive, or destructive, or if there is a drastic change in behavior, it is important to seek professional help from teachers, clergy, counselors, grief services, or doctors.**

WHEN WORKING SPECIFICALLY WITH GRIEVING CHILDREN – What to do...

- Repeated listening to “the stories”
- VALIDATE feelings and responses! – “a normal reaction to an abnormal situation”
- Help prepare for unknowns: funerals, rites and rituals, adult reactions
- Listen to questions and respond honestly
- Model your own feelings, reactions, coping
- Avoid euphemisms such as gone, passed on, lost

Death of a Parent: The Effect on the Family

Brown, Forster, Temes and Akner

The death of one or both parents can have a significant impact on the surviving family members. Each member of a family has their own unique personality and behavior that influences other family members, as well as the family as a whole. When one member dies, the delicate balance of a family is thrown off, as the family struggles to adjust to the “empty chair” in the family.

Finding Family Balance

After a death, the surviving family members must establish new patterns, roles and relationships. Confusion sets in as familiar family roles are abandoned and new ones are established. If a family is to endure, the members must find a way to come out of this period of grief stronger and more firmly bonded. The death of a parent not only upsets the family balance but it can reveal hidden wounds.” Adult children can be forced to confront the truth about family relationships. Hidden resentments, regrets and unspoken words can appear. The parent who has died may have acted as a mediator between different family members. Siblings may fight over disposal of property and possessions. This is usually not caused by greed but the emotional legacy that is given to the possessions. One sibling may feel that they did the most for the parent when they were alive and therefore deserve more of an inheritance. Children may have different memories of the same childhood events. The adult child who tries to build a “shrine” to parents may be offended when others remember something different. It is important to remember that each sibling is their own person and had their own unique relationship with the parent and therefore will grieve differently.

Redefining Roles

The death of a parent can also bring family members together. Surviving family members may now see how fragile life can be, how easily the people they love can be taken away from them and appreciate other family members more. Adult children can take over roles previously held by the parent and go from being one who attends family events to be the one that initiates family get-togethers. Paul Kane, who lost his parents within six month of each other, explains it this way, “I think my parents were the mortar between the bricks as far as the family goes. After they died, we as individuals had to make more effort to get together. There wasn’t the scaffolding anymore, that structure within the family that had given direction to things for 40, 50 years.” (Brown, 2000)

The family is like any other interactive system. Each member leaves a lasting effect on the others. The memories of a loved one provide history and continuity to our lives. The “empty chair” in our lives is not really empty. We have been forever touched by those we love and have been loved by.

Perinatal loss is a death of an infant from miscarriage, still birth, or neonatal death. Often times, parents walking through the loss of a child can feel alienated in their grief and overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, anxiety, fear and sadness.

Grief Reactions after Perinatal/Infant Loss

- Studies reveal that in normal grieving, negative grief indicators such as disbelief, yearning, anger, and depression are at a high during the initial 6 months to a year after the death and declining after. However, in a study looking at bereaved parents after perinatal loss, after the decline, a large percentage of parents showed patterns of pervasive grief. Grief reactions that make perinatal loss unique are a consistent feeling of guilt and self-blame which can prolong the grieving process. For women, another element of perinatal loss is the feeling that their bodies failed which can lead them to question their femininity.
- Parents who have lost a child can often feel isolated. This is sometimes due to alienating themselves from friends or family who have children or are pregnant. Feelings of envy can lead to not wanting to be face to face with what they lost. Isolation can also result from simply not wanting to talk about the loss due to perceived stigma.
- Perinatal loss is often unforeseen, so parents have little to no time to prepare for the loss and grief. They also lack direct experiences or memories with the infant, unlike when other family members die. These two factors can make the grieving process more difficult.
- In the grieving process, being able to say goodbye after the death has a positive impact on the bereaved person. Bereaved parents are often not given this opportunity and often times, due to the nature of perinatal loss, funerals or other rituals will not happen.

Risk factors of Perinatal/Infant Loss Grief Reactions

- A risk factor is poor social support, whether that be friends, family, or one's partner. High levels of social support are linked with lower levels of perinatal grief. Lack of support or feelings of guilt — especially when a grieving partner places “blame” on the mother — can result in intense grief.
- Personality and mental health can also affect grief reactions. Women with a history of mental health issues may develop intense grief reactions after the death. Studies show that after perinatal loss, mothers can struggle with issues that may have been manageable before the pregnancy.

Gender differences

- Perinatal loss clearly distresses and negatively affects women; and while perinatal loss has different impacts on men, they still grieve and feel distinct psychological effects of the death.
- Studies found that fathers grieve less intensely and for shorter periods of time than the mothers. Men grieved in similar ways, just less than women (less crying and less of a need to talk about the death) and often internalized or denied their grief. They also worked to distract themselves from their grief.
- A challenge for both partners is figuring out how to provide support for a partner while simultaneously trying to cope with their own grief.

Ways to Cope with the Loss of Your Child:

- Take time out for you to grieve. If you are able to, take bereavement leave from work.
- Reach out to your family and friends for support. Don't be afraid to communicate what you need and what is and isn't helpful.

- Look into professional counseling to help with the grieving process. Connect with others who have lost children through blogs or support groups.
- Work on your relationship with your partner. Both of you may grieve differently; however, both of you are hurting. Be there to listen and support each other. If possible, look into planning a getaway or time together to reconnect and grieve together.
- Prepare a memory box or scrapbook.
- Write a letter to your baby. Other family members may want to write a letter and kids may want to draw pictures for the baby.
- Keep a journal or a blog. Look for grief resources from agencies, books, internet, counselors, or support groups.
- Make something physical to remember your child by. Plant a garden or tree, make a painting, or build something in memory of your child.
- Decorate your child's grave site for holidays.
- Be patient with yourself. It is not your fault.
- Incorporate the child you lost into your life and family. Healing does not need to look like going back to the way things were before. It is okay to feel like the child you lost will always be a part of you.

Helpful Ways to Respond to Someone Walking through the Loss of a Child:

- "It's not your fault."
- "You are an amazing parent."
- Don't say "all things happen for a reason" or "God has a plan".
- Don't be afraid to say the baby's name (if they have one) or talk about the baby.
- Intentionally ask the parents how they are doing after the loss of their baby. Sometimes not asking is actually more painful because it can feel like their baby doesn't matter.
- Listen and be present. It's okay to cry with the parent. You don't have to have the perfect thing to say, sometimes just being there is the best way you can help them.

Helping and Supporting a Grieving Friend or Loved One

When in doubt, err on the side of silent, emotionally-connected support. If you can't think of something to say, offer eye contact or a squeeze of their hand. Your support can be conveyed with silent presence. It is okay that you don't have all the answers. You can reassure the bereaved person by letting them know that you will be there, as a companion, when needed during this sorrowful time even though you can't take away their pain. Have confidence that they will again find meaning and joy in life.

Dos and Do Nots for Providing Support and Comfort to Adults:

DO

- Behave naturally
- Show genuine concern
- Offer love patiently and unconditionally
- Offer hugs or an arm around the shoulder as appropriate
- Sit next to the person who is wanting closeness
- Make it clear that you are there to listen
- Express your care and concern
- Say "I love you" if you feel close enough
- Talk openly and directly about the person who died
- Cry if you feel like crying
- Keep in mind that evenings, weekends, anniversaries, and holidays can be extra challenging times

DO NOT

- Avoid the bereaved person
- Pry into personal matters
- Ask questions about the circumstances of the death; but do be open to hearing what the bereaved wants to say about it
- Offer advice or quick solutions
- "I know how you feel"
- "You should _"
- "Time heals all wounds"
- Try to cheer up the bereaved or distract them from the emotional intensity:
 - "At least he's no longer in pain"
 - "She is in a better place now"
- Minimize the loss:
 - "Oh, it's not that bad"
 - "You'll be okay"
 - "Things will go back to normal before you know it"
- Lead the bereaved to false assumptions that self-medicating with alcohol and drugs will provide a solution. This is a temporary fix for their emotional pain and makes it worse in the long term.

Death and Grief in the Workplace

Adapted from What's Your Grief

We spend a tremendous amount of time with our coworkers. They touch our lives every day. We work together, laugh together, complain to one another, experience successes and failures together, have good days together, and bad days together. Many times we consider our coworkers friends, sometimes we consider them family. And yet when we experience the death of a coworker we often don't feel we have permission to grieve in the way we would grieve another friend or family member.

There are many reasons coping with the loss of a coworker can present unique challenges. Coworkers are not always acknowledged for the significant role they play in our lives, so we may not feel supported in our feelings of grief. People may assume you should be over it quickly. Our family and other friends may not know the coworker who has died; we may not know the family and friends of our coworker. It may be unclear or confusing how involved we should be in funerals, memorials, or other remembrance events. If we cannot grieve with our coworkers we may feel completely alone, yet our employers don't always encourage us to grieve openly or together. Emotions and work are not things that usually go together. Work has long been considered a place to be productive, not to shed tears. This can be a hard habit to break.

It is important to acknowledge that as a society we are not comfortable dealing with death, so this is not an issue limited to the workplace. After a death it is not surprising to find that your boss and your HR department may not be comfortable with grief, and hence totally lost when it comes to supporting grieving staff. Not to mention they may be grieving themselves. That doesn't mean acknowledging grief in the workplace is a lost cause. We may just need to be more proactive. So what can you do as a manager, HR professional, or just a "regular" employee?

Acknowledging the loss

We know grieving in the workplace can feel foreign and unnatural. Acknowledging the impact of the death of a coworker can make sure that everyone feels safe expressing their feelings. The loss of a coworker is often not validated as a significant loss, so this acknowledgement can allow everyone to feel they have permission to grieve.

Set up a forum for group discussion

Ideally this will be lead by a professional counselor, either from the organization's Employee Assistance Program or a professional grief counselor coming in to facilitate a short-term grief group. A professional is a must for a death that occurred physically in the workplace or for a suicide loss.

Grief groups can also be organized among staff. If the group is unable to meet during the workday, it may take the shape of a weekly lunch, breakfast group before work, or dinner group after work. Providing work time for grief group is a great way to support your employees' healing.

Take advantage of employer services

Many companies have an EAP that offers one-on-one counseling services. If this is the case, as an employee you may wish to find out what is available and schedule an appointment. As a manager or HR professional it is important after a loss to make sure staff are aware of how to contact the EAP. Send out an email and/or post the information in a staff lounge to ensure everyone knows how to utilize these services.

Do something for the family

For many people it is very important to send flowers or send something else to the family. Make a plan as a team or company to do this. This can be especially important if it may be a financial strain for any individual to send something, but as a group and with the support of

management it may be easier. The obvious choice is to send flowers, but there are plenty of other options:

- circulate a card
- send a food basket
- make a donation to a charity the person was connected to
- send a useful item (like a gift card for a maid service, lawn service, or carry out restaurant)
- create a memorial book for the family, with memories and work accomplishments
- gather photos from work events that the family may not have of the person to share
- donate to a scholarship fund for the person's children

Attend the funeral

Coworkers can sometimes feel unsure if they should attend the viewing, funeral, or other memorial. Establishing what the company will support and making plans as a group can ease this uncertainty. As a manager or HR professional it is important to clearly establish whether staff will be allowed to attend a service during work hours or if bereavement leave will be in effect. To support people in attending you may wish to plan carpooling from the office, or even a shuttle.

The reality is that many workplaces will not be able to shut down to allow all staff to attend a memorial. If this is the case, ask for volunteers to work. This will allow others to attend the service. Those who were not as close to the person who died, or who do not wish to attend the service, may volunteer. If this is the case make sure to acknowledge them for their willingness to help others who wished to attend.

Create a memorial or a memorial service

Sometimes very few staff will be able to attend a service, due to logistics or if it is being held out of the area. Even if many staff attend the service, doing something specific for the workplace may also be important. A small ceremony where people can share memories is easy to organize and can be very therapeutic. Additionally, creating a memorial at the office can be a wonderful way to remember the person who has died. Posting a small memorial plaque, planting a tree, naming a conference room or meeting room, or creating a simple memorial bulletin board are wonderful options! You may also wish to do a memorial slideshow or photobook at an all staff meeting, annual holiday party, or other organizational event.

Loss from an Overdose

Information found from "What's your Grief" and "Center on Addiction"

Losing someone from an overdose brings a unique type of grief. You may feel alone in your grief. You may feel angry at your loved one. You may be dealing with self-blame, wondering how things might have been different or if you could have changed anything. You also may fear talking about how your loved one passed, out of fear of other's judging or looking over the greatness of your loved one.

The premise behind addiction:

It is important to understand the background of addiction when coping with such immense emotions and grief. It can be helpful to realize that addiction is not a result of you, nor your loved one, but it is a challenging disease that has been handed to them. A disease works by dramatically altering the way an organ functions. Addiction does this by changing the fundamental structure of the brain. Just like people do not choose to have diabetes or cancer, **one does not choose to have an addiction.** Receiving quality treatment for addiction is very important, but unfortunately as a part of recovery, relapse and overdose can be common.

You may feel overwhelmed with many emotional shifts.

Whatever you are feeling is okay. Some emotions may include:

- **Anger** towards your loved one, yourself, or the situation
- **Sadness**
- **Guilt**
- **Shame**
- **Isolated or lonely**
- **Relief** that your loved one no longer has to fight their battle
- **Blame** on yourself, someone else, or your loved one
- **Fear and anxiety** towards unresolved questions, talking about your loved one, and avoiding judgements

Talking to people you trust and finding safe supports may help. You do not have to face your grief alone.

Stigmas surrounding overdose:

One of the biggest factors that makes grief from an overdose different from others is the heavy stigma encompassing it. People are quick to pass judgements that an addict simply "lacks control" or is selfish. There are also stigmas pointed towards the family- that they did something to cause the addiction, or did not provide adequate care to prevent the overdose. These stigmas can make it really difficult for survivors to feel comfortable reaching out and talking about their loss. They often take their pain on alone to avoid negative criticisms and to help save the reputation of their loved one.

How to help someone who has lost a loved one from substance abuse:

- **Don't avoid the topic.** Those hurting oftentimes need to talk through their grief to start healing. Don't feel that you are unequipped to listen and talk about their loved one. You do not have to have all the answers, but can dramatically help.
- **Refrain from judgement.**
- **Make small gestures to show you are still present.** Sending a card, calling them, dropping off food, or visiting their loved one's memorial are ways to step in and show that you are here for the person grieving.
- **Encourage talking about positive memories and qualities of the person who died.**
- **Keep calling and inviting them,** and be okay with them needing space.

Things to avoid:

- Belittling the death, or pressuring them to “get over it”
- Bringing their loss into social situations or sharing it with others
- Distancing yourself out of discomfort towards the situation
- Forcing social situations
- Comparing your hardships to their hardships
- Personal opinions

Overall, it is important to give yourself time to grieve. Surround yourself with people who make you feel loved and supported. Take time to give yourself credit and recognize your strength. Do not beat yourself up for having rough days or feeling certain emotions.

Oftentimes one fears that resuming life means that they have forgotten their loved one. Rest assured, this is not true. They will be right with you in your heart, always.

Helpful Hints for Holiday Loss

Talia Lakritz, Insider

The holidays can be a difficult time for those grieving the loss of a loved one. Finding meaningful ways to incorporate their memory into the festivities can be comforting. Whether the person who died was old, young, or not yet born, whether their death was sudden or a slow decline, whether they died recently or years ago, the season's emphasis on family, togetherness, and joy can painfully underscore who's missing from the celebrations.

Give yourself permission to turn down invitations

Especially in the first year or two after a loss, well-meaning friends and family might try to make the holidays happier for you by inviting you to their celebrations. Being around other people can be helpful, even if adjustments have to be made.

"I try to encourage people not to isolate during the holidays," said Dr. Jennifer Guttman, cognitive behavioral therapist and author of "A Path to Sustainable Life Satisfaction." "Find comfort in being with friends or other family members. Try to come up with new traditions if the past traditions are too painful. Sometimes people choose to celebrate in a new location to trigger fewer memories. Remember to engage in self-care and if some activity is too painful, speak up about it so that an alternative activity can be developed."

However, numerous invitations to festive events can feel overwhelming when you're grieving. Megan Devine, psychotherapist, grief advocate, and author of "It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand," says it's OK to politely decline.

"It's important to remember that you don't have to defend your reasons for not wanting to participate," she said. "It is enough to say, 'I don't have it in me this year to attend, but I appreciate the invitation.'"

Find meaningful ways to honor their memory

You and your loved ones may decide to keep everything the same or change everything — or you may fall somewhere in between. If you do feel like celebrating in some way, you can incorporate the person's memory into the holidays by:

- Displaying photos of them next to a holiday objects
- Setting a place for them at the table
- Making their favorite foods or using their recipes
- Toasting to their memory
- Having a moment of silence for them
- Hanging a special Christmas tree ornament for them or other holiday decorations
- Donating to a cause in their name
- Posting about them on social media
- Hosting a storytelling get-together where people share memories

"None of these things are to make it feel better, but it's to acknowledge who's missing," said Devine. "I'm always a big fan of naming the elephant in the room instead of pretending it's not there."

People's posts about their holiday celebrations with family and friends can magnify the emptiness of missing someone you love. But Dr. Catherine Sanderseon, Manwell Family Professor in Life Sciences (Psychology) at Amherst College and author of "The Positive Shift," says it's important to remember you're not alone.

"It's important to recognize that the glowing holiday portrayals on social media don't necessarily represent reality," she said. "You are not alone in feeling sadness, grief, and loss — in fact, many people find the holidays really difficult, even if they aren't sharing those feelings openly on social media."

Online communities can be a source of comfort, too. Members of one of Devine's workshops maintain a Facebook group where they ask each other to light candles or share photos with a special hashtag on the anniversary of a loved one's death. Their feeds are then filled with outpourings of support on what is sure to be a tough day.

"In a lot of ways, fortunately or unfortunately, we find a lot more support online than we do in person in times of grief," said Devine. "Leaning on social media can be really helpful as a way to feel like there's a community that you have around you. Having other people to speak your person's name is powerful and beautiful."

Take your time

"For many people, dealing with grief is like facing a fear," said Guttman. "It's important that we challenge ourselves to face our fears. Be patient, resilient and understand that it takes time for people to grieve, heal and accept the loss of a loved one. Don't be afraid to do it at your own pace, one step at time."

Coping with Guilt after a Suicide

It is natural to look back after a suicide and wonder if we could have prevented it. We want to make sense of how tragedies happen, and even find somebody to blame. Even small comments or actions before a suicide later seem like big red flags announcing a person's plan to take their own life.

Remembering that there is rarely one single word, action, or lack of action that causes suicide is important. They are merely pieces of the puzzle that makes up the mystery of why someone dies by suicide.

"Why didn't I see this coming?"

- "If I had just been paying attention, I would have seen the signs and stopped this tragedy."
- "It's my fault; I refused to listen and answer the cry for help."
- "Why did I have to start an argument over something so stupid?"

"I should have seen the signs..."

A common misconception is that signs of suicides are preventable. The truth is, many people who are planning to complete suicide hide these behaviors behind friendly smiles or closed doors, and many of the risk factors are also just normal human activities: for example, a person who has been ill will naturally withdraw from company while they recover (isolation). These things alone are not risk factors for suicide but can be pieces of a much larger puzzle.

"There were better options than suicide!"

Suicide is not a rational decision made by a fully functioning person. Just like any other part of the body, brains can experience injury. The brain of a suicidal person is unable to act rationally, because it is so overwhelmed by pain. The only thing that the brain is concerned with is ending pain, and the only option it allows a person to see is suicide. For that individual, suicide is seen as the only way to end their pain. There are no other options.

Sometimes a person contemplating suicide may even express happiness and no sign of distress just hours before taking his or her life, causing even more confusion or anger for those grieving their death.

"Didn't they love me enough to keep living?"

Many who have attempted suicide expressed the feeling that they were doing loved ones a favor; their deaths would remove a burden from their loved ones, and possibly bring about financial help (life insurance money). Suicide is seen by these people as a merciful act performed out of love. For others, the suicide brain forces them to believe that they are unloved, and that suicide is their only way to escape that pain.

Saying that most suicides are preventable is very hurtful to the family and friends of the deceased. Many survivors have spent years trying to help the deceased who was struggling with a mental illness.

"I feel so guilty and angry."

It is common that even when our logical minds may tell us we are not to blame, our aching hearts feel guilt. It takes time for the heart and head to come together and tolerating this is just part of processing grief.

Even with all of the facts, you may still feel guilt and anger around your loved one's suicide. Guilt and anger are normal feelings when we are grieving. It is okay to experience guilt and anger, whether or not it is a rational reaction. When you are experiencing these painful feelings, check in with yourself: do you have someone you can talk to about these feelings, either in person or on the phone? Do you need to speak with a professional? Don't allow your grief, guilt, and anger to isolate you from those who care about you and those who cared about your loved one. If you are feeling overwhelmed, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a great place to find a caring ear and many resources to help you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 1-800-273-8255.

Helping a Suicide Survivor Heal

Alan D. Wolfelt

Suicide and Silent Grief:

Historian Arnold Toynbee once wrote, "There are always two parties to death; the person who dies and the survivors who are bereaved." Unfortunately, many survivors of suicide suffer alone in silence. The silence that surrounds them often complicates the healing that comes from being encouraged to mourn.

Because of the social stigma surrounding suicide, survivors feel the pain of the loss, yet many don't know how, where, or if they should express it. Yet, the only way to heal is to mourn. Just like other bereaved persons grieving the loss of someone loved, suicide survivors need to talk, to cry, to sometimes scream, in order to heal.

As a result of fear and misunderstanding, survivors of suicide deaths are often left with a feeling of abandonment at a time when they desperately need unconditional support and understanding. Without a doubt, suicide survivors suffer in a variety of different ways; they are often shunned by a society unwilling to enter into the pain of their grief.

How Can You Help?

A friend or family member has experienced the death of a loved one from suicide. You want to help, but you are not sure how to go about it. This will help guide you in ways to turn your cares and concerns into positive actions.

Accept the Intensity of the Grief

Grief following suicide is always complex. Survivors don't "get over it." Instead, with support and understanding they can come to reconcile themselves to its reality.

Don't be surprised by the intensity of their feelings.

Sometimes, when they least expect it, they may be overwhelmed by feelings of grief. Accept that survivors may be struggling with explosive emotions, guilt, fear, and shame, well beyond the limits experienced in

other types of death. Be patient, compassionate and understanding.

Listen with Your Heart

Assisting suicide survivors means you must break down the terribly costly silence. Helping begins with your ability to be an active listener. Your physical presence and desire to listen without judgement are critical helping tools. Willingness to listen is the best way to offer help to someone who needs to talk.

Thoughts and feelings inside the survivor may be frightening and difficult to acknowledge. Don't worry so much about what you will say. Just concentrate on the words that are being shared with you.

Your friend may relate the same story about death over and over again. Listen attentively each time. Realize this repetition is part of your friend's healing process. Simply listen and understand. And remember, you don't have to have the answer.

Avoid Simplistic Explanations and Clichés

Words, particularly clichés, can be extremely painful for a suicide survivor. Clichés are trite comments often intended to diminish the loss by providing simple solutions to difficult realities. Comments like, "You are holding up so well," "Time will heal all wounds," "Think of what you still have to be thankful for" or "You have to be strong for others" are not constructive. Instead, they hurt and make a friend's journey through grief more difficult. Be certain to avoid passing judgement or providing simplistic explanations of the suicide. Don't make the mistake of saying the person who died by suicide was "out of their mind." Informing a survivor that someone they loved was "crazy or insane" typically only complicates the situation. Suicide survivors need help coming to their own understanding of what has happened. In the end, their personal search for understanding the meaning of the death is what is really important.

Be Compassionate

Give your friend permission to express their feelings without fear of criticism. Learn from your friend. Don't instruct or set expectations about how they should respond. Never say, "I know just how you feel." You don't. Think of yourself as someone who "walks with," not "behind" or "in front of" the one who is bereaved.

Familiarize yourself with the wide spectrum of emotions that many survivors of suicide experience. Allow your friend to experience all of the hurt, sorrow, and pain that they may be feeling at that time. Recognize that tears are a natural and appropriate expression of the pain associated with loss.

Respect the Need to Grieve

Often ignored in their grief are the immediate and extended family of persons who have died by suicide. Why? Because the nature of the death, it is sometimes kept a secret. If the death cannot be talked about openly, the wounds of grief will go unhealed.

As a caring friend, you may be the only one willing to be with the survivors. Your physical presence and permissive listening create a foundation for the healing process. Allow the survivors to talk, but don't push them. Sometimes, you may get a cue to back off and wait. If you get a signal that this is what is needed, let them know you are ready to listen if, and when, they want to share their thoughts and feelings.

Understand the Uniqueness of Suicide Grief

Keep in mind that the grief of suicide survivors is unique. No one will respond to the death of someone loved in exactly the same way. While it may be possible to talk about similar phases shared by survivors, everyone is different and shaped by experiences in his or own life.

Because the grief experience is unique, be patient. The process of grief takes a long time, so allow your friend to proceed at their own pace. Don't criticize what is inappropriate behavior. Remember that the death of someone to suicide is a shattering experience. As a result of the death, your friend's life is under reconstruction.

Be Aware of Holidays and Anniversaries

Survivors of suicide may have a difficult time during special occasions like holidays and anniversaries. These events emphasize the absence of the person who has died. Respect this pain as a natural expression of the grief process. Learn from it. And, most importantly, never try to take their hurt away.

Use the name of the person who has died when talking to survivors. Hearing the name can be comforting and it confirms that you have not forgotten this important person who was so much a part of their lives.

Be Aware of Support Groups

Support groups are one of the best ways to help survivors of suicide. In a group, survivors can connect with other people who share the commonality of the experience. They are allowed and encouraged to tell their stories as much, and as often, as they like. You may be able to help survivors locate such a group. This practical effort on your part will be appreciated.

Respect Faith and Spirituality

If you allow them, a survivor of suicide will "teach you" about their feelings regarding faith and spirituality. If faith is a part of their lives, let them express it in ways that seem appropriate. If they are mad at God, encourage them to talk about it. Remember, having anger at God speaks of having a relationship with God. Don't be a judge, be a loving friend.

Misconceptions about Suicide

1. Most people who threaten suicide are just looking for attention, they won't complete suicide.

Not true. Almost everyone who dies by suicide has given some clue or warning. Do not ignore suicide threats. Statements like "You'll be sorry when I'm dead," "I can't see any way out," no matter how casually or jokingly said, may indicate serious suicidal feelings.

Anyone who talks of suicide needs to be listened to carefully, even if they have threatened suicide before and never followed through. Mentioning suicide is a sign they are in some kind of pain.

2. Anyone who completes suicide is selfish. They should have thought about how their actions would hurt other people.

People who contemplate suicide feel both helpless and hopeless, often seeing the act of suicide as the only way out and that they are only a burden to their family.

Expecting a suicidal brain to be able to think clearly is like expecting someone with two broken legs to run a race.

3. The most common reason for a teen to kill themselves is bullying.

Bullying can be a significant factor in some suicides, but we must remember it is just one piece of the puzzle. Usually multiple factors were involved in most suicides. Most common are mental health issues.

4. Those that die from suicide acted depressed before and people just missed the signs.

Sometimes there are no obvious signs, and an individual may even seem happy or calm just hours before they take their own life. It is easy to see warning signs looking back that were not obvious before.

5. Anyone who tries to kill themselves must be crazy or mentally ill.

Not true. Most suicidal people are not psychotic or insane. They may be upset, grief stricken, depressed or despairing. Extreme distress and emotional pain are always signs of mental illness but are not signs of psychosis.

6. Suicidal individuals always think about exactly how they are going to complete suicide and plan it all out.

The decision to complete suicide can be an impulsive one, especially if a traumatic event happened.

7. Someone with a specific plan isn't any more likely to die from suicide than someone just thinking about it.

If a person has a specific plan, they are at much greater risk of following through. A mental health professional must always be contacted immediately if a person expresses a specific plan.

8. There is always a note explaining why.

Not always.

9. Talking about suicide may give someone the idea.

Not true. You don't give a person ideas by talking about suicide. Actually, the opposite is true. Bringing up the subject of suicide and discussing it openly is one of the most helpful things you can do.

Suicides are not contagious. No one suddenly becomes suicidal after hearing about or witnessing a suicide. That would be like saying if one neighbor died from cancer and another neighbor died from the same type of cancer in the same week, one must have caused the other to happen.

9. If a person is determined to kill themselves, nothing is going to stop them.

Not true. Even the most severely depressed person has mixed feelings about death, and most waiver until the very last moment between wanting to live and wanting to end their pain. Most suicidal people do not want to die; they want the pain to stop. The impulse to end it all, however overpowering, does not last forever.

10. People who die by suicide are people who were unwilling to seek help.

Not true. Studies of adult suicide victims have shown that more than half had sought medical help within six months before their deaths and a majority had seen a medical professional within one month of their death.

An article from the American Psychological Association defined traumatic loss by saying, “a death is considered traumatic if it occurs without warning; if it is untimely; if it involves violence; if there is damage to the loved one’s body; if it was caused by a perpetrator with the intent to harm; if the survivor regards the death as preventable; if the survivor believes that the loved one suffered; or if the survivor regards the death, or manner of death, as unfair and unjust” (Barle, N. & Wortman, C.B., 2017). When someone suffers a traumatic loss, they are impacted by both the trauma of the death and the grief of the loss. They immediately are faced with the need to cope with the shock of the situation and the grief. Often times, a traumatic loss can result in many questions that are sometimes left unanswered. Someone who is bereaving a traumatic loss of a loved one can sometimes experience grief in a more challenging or prolonged way than someone walking through normal grief. Traumatic loss can manifest itself in a variety of reactions, from excessive irritability, to disinterest in planning for the future, to continued insomnia or nightmares. These challenging grief reactions after a traumatic loss can last longer than normal grief, which usually lasts two months after the death.

Impacts of Traumatic Loss:

- Questioning their expectations of the world
 - After the death, someone might question if the world is safe or if they have control over situations. They might question people’s motives or their faith/belief system.
- Frustrations over unanswered questions
 - Because many traumatic losses are unforeseen and sudden, people are left with many unanswered questions pertaining to why it happened, who is to blame, did their loved one suffer, if their death was preventable, etc.
- Blaming themselves for the death or circumstances surrounding the death
- Feeling isolated or like no one understands their pain

- Some people who have experienced traumatic loss can also experience post-traumatic stress disorder.

An example of traumatic loss is death by homicide. The following are specific examples relating to grieving while bereaving a death by homicide.

Tips for Healing After Death by Homicide:

- Rely on community: allow friends and family to support you, find a support group or online community of people walking through similar grief.
- Remember your loved one: create a physical item to remember them by, look through photographs of them and think of shared memories. This can help you remember your loved one for all they were, not just the terrible way they died.
- Write a letter to your loved one sharing the things you wish you had the opportunity to tell them. This can help you process through your grief and the surprising nature of their death.
- Address your trauma-related reactions with a mental health professional. Look for someone who is trauma informed who can talk through different experiences you are having (nightmares, flashbacks, fear, avoiding people and places, etc).

Programs and Services

Braving Grief: Support Groups

Groups aim to foster a safe and supportive space, with a focus on finding personal strength, forming deeper relationships, sharing your story, discovering more meaning in life, and seeing new possibilities. With the goal of promoting peer support and connectivity, support groups work to recognize how grief affects our minds and our bodies. Trained facilitators guide groups through meaningful discussion and activities. Each activity helps participants learn healthy coping skills, and create rituals to honor their loved ones who have died.

Groups are open to adults, and to children ages 5 and older.

Multiple grief group sessions are held throughout the year, with meetings held one night each week for six weeks. Every support group includes dinner followed by small group activities based on age and type of loss to facilitate discussion and sharing. Virtual options may also be available.

Childcare is available upon request for children younger than kindergarten. Registration is required.

School-Based Support

Studies show that roughly 1 in 14 school-aged children will lose a parent, and 1 in 5 will lose someone close to them. Feelings of grief and loss can also stem from divorce, abandonment, incarceration, and other traumatic events.

Since 2018, EveryStep's Amanda the Panda program has provided on-site programming at more than 30 Iowa schools to support children experiencing grief and loss. Throughout each 6-week session, students share their grief stories, connect with peers and learn resiliency skills to feel better equipped to cope with grief in healthy ways.

Each child's grief is personal and unique. Our staff are trained to assist with the complexity of what it means to experience grief and loss at a young age.

By giving kids healthy coping skills and tools to address their grief, we can help them down a path that leads to healing, positive relationships with others, and success at school. Our group-based approach provides the necessary amount of support for most kids, while allowing our staff to identify kids who need a higher level of support.

Cheer Box

The holidays can be extremely difficult the first year after the death of a loved one. Each year, hundreds of volunteers assemble and deliver Cheer Boxes, filled with 12 meaningful gifts that give individuals and families the opportunity to come together and honor their loved one. Nominations for recipients can be made year-round by visiting our website.

Community Support

Many times we experience grief as a community. Maybe your organization or workplace has lost a member of its team, or your town is suffering the loss of a special individual. We offer support to groups and entire communities through our Day of Hope and Healing and with other programs tailored to the needs of the community. Activities help residents heal after tragedy and promote healing for losses that may not fit within our traditional support groups.

Supplemental Programming

Ranging from dinner club gatherings for young adults, to opportunities to attend local events, Amanda the Panda engages participants in activities that promote socialization and help individuals, children, and families rebuild after the death of a loved one.

For volunteer opportunities or to register for programs, visit everystep.org or call us at (515) 223-4847.

Our Hospice Offices

Centerville

(641) 856-5502

(800) 500-2614

Des Moines

(515) 333-5810

Mount Ayr

(641) 464-2088

(888) 464-7222

Mount Pleasant

(319) 385-4472

(888) 385-4472

Winterset (515)

462-5205 (877)

642-2888

Our Hospice House

Kavanagh House

900 56th Street, Des Moines

(515) 255-0857

Amanda the Panda

Grief & Loss Services for

Adults, Teens and Children

(515) 223-4847

(877) 533-4847

EveryStep 
Grief & Loss Services
everystep.org

