

## I Recognize Your Face, But...

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Have you ever bumped into someone at the grocery store or while shopping at the mall and recognize her but couldn't for the life of you place the face with a name? You smile and chat for 3-5 minutes, trying desperately to dig in your mental filing cabinet to find the correct file — but fail. As soon as she walks away, the file lights up, "Sara!"



Imagine that scenario without the light firing when she walks away. The fog is thick! Thick brain fog is a symptom one might not have prepared for after the loss of a loved one, spouse or significant other. Sadness, sorrow, anxiety, loneliness... the list goes on and on. These are some of the symptoms one might expect during the grieving process.

Have you ever put your keys in the freezer or the ice cream in the pantry? Have you waited at a stop sign for it to turn green? What's going on in your brain to explain these odd behaviors?

**What IS Going On?**

Research supports that during the early stages of grief, participants with complicated grief experience difficulty in cognitive functioning, information processing speed and have a lower brain volume than non-grievors (Saavedra Perez, H.C., et al, 2014).

Grief may negatively impact you in the following areas (Fane, B. 2016):

- Concentration
- Completing tasks or projects
- Memory and recall
- Decision making
- Organization and planning

Just as you are experiencing physical, psychological and emotional responses to your grief, your brain is experiencing a biological response to your loss. Neurotransmitters, which are chemical messengers that send signals between neurons in the brain, are firing at different levels as it is responding to and is affected by a wide variety of both

physical and psychological functions including heart rate, sleep, appetite, mood and fear (Cherry, K., 2018). The initial shock of the death of a loved one instantly affects your mind and body. One might become disorganized, distracted, distressed, disoriented and simply off their rocker! It's no wonder why everything appears foggy. The tasks we once did habitually seem challenging, and the more difficult tasks now feel impossible. The combination of sleep deprivation, changes in eating habits and stress, in addition to the loss of your loved one, can create a thick mental brain fog — which is a common symptom of grief.

But the good news is... the fog will lift.

### **Help Lift This Brain Fog!**

Here are some suggestions...

- 1) Normalize: Remind yourself that your brain fog is a normal symptom of grief.
- 2) Expectations: Lower your expectations of yourself. You can only accomplish so much!
- 3) Set small goals: Divide tasks into smaller, achievable, attainable increments.
- 4) Time: Give yourself extra time to get ready or to accomplish tasks.
- 5) Rebuild: Slowly start to rebuild a daily routine that will help establish new habits, a new normal.

6) List: Writing down your thoughts, your grocery list or other helpful reminders can help when memory is feeling foggy.

7) Say it out loud! You're more likely to remember something if you say it out loud. "I am setting my keys on the kitchen table."

8) Health: Sleep deprivation, eating processed foods or not eating enough could result in suffering more fatigue and brain fog. Getting the right amount of sleep and healthy eating habits are an important part of your healing.

9) Patience: Above all, be patient with yourself. You are experiencing a life-changing, stressful event. Provide yourself the love and patience you deserve.

Your psychological grief responses pull from different regions of your brain, activating and affecting areas that manage attention, memory, planning, self expression, language, appetite and sleep. Your brain's resources are overwhelmed and you begin to draw a blank as you long painfully for your loved one. Grief is front and center in your head as well as your heart. It is important to be kind to yourself as you mourn. Your ability to function will not always be this challenging, and you will eventually emerge from the fog.