

25 Factors That Affect How You Grieve And Heal From The Death Of A Loved One

Not everyone grieves in the same way. Oh, yes, there are sometimes similarities in the thread of your grief... but your grief and the way you grieve is unique to you. What in the world does that mean? The following are some of the factors that may affect the way you grieve and heal.

1) The type and quality of your relationship with your loved one.

The type and quality of your relationship you had can impact the way you grieve. It's important to understand that it doesn't matter if you are grieving the loss of a pet, a family member or friend. The relationship is based on the impact and influence they had on your life. Therefore, your grief for a friend or a pet may be greater than an estranged sibling or parent. It's important to bring light to the type and quality of your relationship with your loved one and to focus on what your loved one meant to you and your life. The greater the influence they had on your life, the longer it may take to navigate through the grieving process.

2) How your loved one died.

A sudden shock of loss can be a punch to the gut that stays with you. You had no time to prepare yourself. A long illness takes a toll as well, and although you thought you'd be prepared, the reality and finality is still painful. There is no easy way when a loved one dies. It's important to allow yourself to know you've experienced a trauma and there will be a process to your grief, having patience with yourself and others and knowing the shock will lessen as will the toll of the loss.

3) Whether or not you were able to say goodbye to your loved one.

In a sudden death, and no goodbye, there can be a sense that there was not enough said. When a

loved one dies from illness, there can still be not enough said; talking about death is not easy and often not spoken about. It's important to allow yourself to know that although the words were not spoken, they were felt within the love that was shared.



4) Previous losses you have experienced in your life and how they were grieved... or not.

Previous life experiences with losses can influence how you grieve or even if you give yourself permission to grieve. Death often reminds us of our past losses. The grief from these

earlier losses may affect our current grieving process. It is important to provide space for each loss and to manage the grief from the earlier losses in order to guide the current grief through the process. Otherwise, they get coupled together and might become more complex and complicated.

5) Your personal resources for releasing stress.

Meditation and mindfulness, exercise, yoga, Nature, hiking, praying, spending time with loving pets are just a few resourceful ways to attend to and release stress in the body. Your body can be like a pressure cooker and needs a valve for stress release. Having resources can help you to better negotiate grief with its ups and downs.

6) Your attachment history as a child.

How secure did you feel as a child in relation to your parents or primary caregivers? Did you trust that they would come if you needed them? Did they teach you that you're okay? Did you feel securely connected to them and others? When we learn that we have secure attachments to those that we love... it can sometimes transfer to when they die. We can still feel a security inside of ourselves. We somehow can trust that we're okay even though we're grieving.

7) Your personal level of resiliency.

We seem to be born with and also learn how to be resilient in times of challenge and stress. Who your role models were, who you observed and trusted during times of early transitions, can be important to recall in times of grief.

8) Your financial situation.

When a loved one dies, there are secondary losses and one of those is financial. The worry over finances and the “what if’s” of what will be, is an additional stress that adds to the pain of grief. It is important to give yourself permission to reach out for expertise in handling situations that will give you trust in the process and relief to grieve.

9) Your religious background.

Religion, spiritual beliefs and what you believe at a time of a loved one’s death can bring some solace through those beliefs. Research has shown that those with some kind of a belief system do “better.” It gives them something to guide them and hold onto.

10) Your cultural background.

Every culture has its own set of beliefs that help individuals understand their world and their roles in their world. Each culture has its own beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life as well as understanding death. Regardless of where on the planet you were born, or your cultural background, all cultures are united in that everyone eventually dies. One’s culture may help an individual conceptualize death and to create a belief system about what happens to a person after they die.

11) Your personal strengths.

In time of grief, it can be hard to believe you have any strength at all. But belief that there is strength, within the grief, is what will help you through. The strength to believe, the strength to keep walking, the strength to grieve in community. All those strengths, and more, are worth the belief, if you are willing to give yourself that permission and opportunity.

12) Your anxiety level and ability to be alone.

Anne Lamott is quoted as saying, “My mind is a neighborhood I try not to go into alone.” It’s one thing to be alone, it’s another to be alone with thoughts that are “What if..?” or “Why didn’t I...?” or many other thoughts that increase

anxiety, and/or depression. Giving yourself permission to have self forgiveness of things you had no control over will lessen the anxiety and allow for healthier alone time.

13) Whether or not you’re still working on a job.

Having a routine that was in place before your loved one died gives you a bit of a “road map” to travel during this difficult time. You get up, you get dressed, you go to work and do your “normal routine” when the rest of your world is no longer normal. It helps to do what was... now. Having a sense of purpose when life just doesn’t feel like it has a purpose... makes a difference.

14) Your belief system about death and what happens after death.

Is your belief system, whatever it may be, a comfort to you? What you believe may be empowering and help you as you process your grief. Some people choose not to believe in after-life and that is also a belief system that could be of comfort. There are many beliefs and they can all be of support and make a difference. Belief systems often get challenged when your loved one dies. What you believe now may not be what you choose to believe later.

15) Your ability to be alone with yourself.

When you are alone do you read? Do you sew, garden? Watch a movie? Are you someone who treasures your alone time and solitude, or someone who is angry to be alone and has a need to run all the time? How you comfort yourself and provide self support may be helpful to your grief process.

16) Your personality.

There is a relationship between personality and the grief process. Some people are more analytical — determined to push through — and that can also mean expectations to be finished with grief, be hard on themselves for “not being further along.” Another personality type might be more inclined to have deeper conversations. Some personality types might be more creative and process feelings through their art or writing. Some others may want to mask their feelings so as not to be a “burden” to anyone. Knowing yourself and giving yourself permission to share how you process feelings can help acknowledge those feelings along the grief journey.

17) Your independence level prior to the death of your spouse.

Perhaps you worked, perhaps sometimes you met friends for a movie or sports events. You were independent in some ways and joined with your spouse in other ways. The ways you were joined are missing now. Some things you never had to do or even think about are now falling on you. It may feel you were dependent on him/her and are now feeling you don't know how to do some of those things he/she did. Trust that what you don't know now, you may know in time.

18) Your age and developmental stage of life.

When you're younger and have a loved one die, especially a spouse, you are often willing and yearning to connect again. You don't want to spend the rest of your life ahead alone. When you're older, it might feel different. You may have the yearning but feel that life is so much shorter. It just seems so difficult to negotiate such a changed world and relationships, leaving you feeling more vulnerable, anxious and alone.

You may have spent a good part of your life with someone who understood you, so words were not always needed. If you are 80 and spent 45 years with your loved one, that is a major part of your lifespan. If you are 40 and spent 15 years with your loved one, that is also a major part of your life. At either age you are now, a part of your development as a wife/husband/partner was with the love of that person. Now being able to share your feelings with friends, family and in group is unfamiliar and unsafe territory. Feeling safe and trusting again is a process.

19) The quality of your support network, family and friends.

Quality not quantity of support makes a difference. Having someone who listens to you can be very comforting. Letting people know that they provide you with comfort can be as helpful to them as it is to you. You may need to be the one to educate others about your needs.

20) How your family dealt with grief when you were growing up.

Many families did not talk to the younger members of the family about what happened when a relative or family friend died. It was "Keep quiet and pull up your socks and keep going." Emotions were pushed down/kept in. In

today's world we know that grief in community makes a difference. That people who talk about their grief, support others and take in support have a better outcome.

21) Your physical, mental and emotional health.

Caring enough to have self care in mind is important. For example, eating healthy gives you the fuel to keep on going. Walking and smelling the flowers, paying attention to how you talk to yourself, and being kind to yourself all contribute to a healthy life.

22) Whether or not you have pets that are important to you.

Our unconditional love of a pet gives us a reason to get up in the morning. You just can't stay in bed nor alone inside inside of yourself. With a beloved pet, you have someone, another living Soul to take care of outside of You. You love them so you get up and feed them, walk them, clean their litters, talk to them and love them. If you forget, they love you anyway and wait patiently. If you're a pet person, your loving pet gives you a purpose to keep living, walking and loving.

23) The season of the year.

Sometimes the season of the year makes a difference. The length of the daylight, the holidays, rain, heat, etc. It all can contribute and can impact the quality of our grieving and how we function in our lives.

24) Ability to have self compassion and self comfort.

Self compassion and self comfort are part of being present with what you are doing in the moment, allowing yourself to simply be, without judging yourself or others or being angry with yourself or others. Self compassion allows you to be kind to yourself when you need it the most. Without the ability to self comfort and find self compassion, grief can become a more difficult and tumultuous journey.

25) Being in a grief support group.

The chemistry of grief is in your body. We mourn when we are in community with others. In a grief support group, you find a community that truly understands and helps you through by witnessing, holding a sacred space. By listening and helping you by normalizing and educating you about what you're experiencing. Being with others who "get it" will definitely change the way you grieve and heal.