

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

*"Finding your way through loss,
one day at a time"*



THE **HOPE** LINE
www.TheHopeLine.com

first of all... you're not alone

Whether you're walking through a loss of your own or trying to support someone who is, we're really glad you're here. Grief is one of the hardest things any of us goes through, and it's not something you were ever meant to carry by yourself.

However you're feeling right now, and whatever you've lost, your grief is real and it matters.



Chat with a Hope Coach!

When grief feels like too much to hold, you don't have to face it alone. Visit TheHopeLine.com/chat-live to connect with a Hope Coach who will listen and help you find support. TheHopeLine is available 24/7.



WHAT IS *GRIEF*?

Grief is the natural response to losing someone or something that mattered to you. It can feel overwhelming, and at times it may seem like the sadness will never lift. While it might always be with you, it will shift. **Here are a few things worth holding onto as you begin to understand it.**

Grief is a **NATURAL** Response to Loss.

It isn't a weakness, a disorder, or something to be ashamed of. It's the normal, human reaction to losing something you care about. Everyone who loves will grieve at some point.

It Rarely Moves in a Straight Line.

Grief can feel like a roller coaster. Better days and harder days often mix together, and waves of emotion can show up long after you thought you were doing okay. That's normal.

There's no **SINGLE RIGHT WAY** to Do It.

Grief looks different for everyone. Some people cry often, others rarely. Some want to talk it out, others need quiet. However you grieve, it's valid.

Grief is **BIGGER** Than Death Alone

We grieve all kinds of losses: breakups, moves, changes in health, dreams that didn't come true. If something you cared about is gone, it's okay to grieve it.



A photograph of a person walking away from the camera down a paved path. The path is lined with trees that have vibrant autumn foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and brown. The person is wearing a light-colored jacket and dark pants. The background shows a clear sky and more trees in the distance.

TYPES OF LOSS

GRIEF COMES FROM MORE THAN DEATH

When we hear the word grief, most of us picture the death of someone we love. That's a profound loss, but it's far from the only kind. **Grief can follow any experience where we have to let go of something that mattered to us.** In fact, if you look around, there's a good chance many of the people near you are quietly grieving something right now.

Here are some of the losses that can bring on grief.

The death of someone you love. A parent, a spouse, a child, a friend, or anyone whose place in your life can't be replaced. Losing a beloved pet belongs here too.

The end of a relationship. A breakup, a divorce, or a friendship that fades or falls apart. The person may still be here, but the relationship you counted on is gone.

The loss of a dream. Sometimes we grieve something we never fully had but deeply hoped for: struggles with infertility, a career that didn't work out, or a future we pictured that won't happen. It's real loss, and it deserves real grief.

Losing an ability. An injury, an illness, or simply getting older can take away something your body used to do. Adjusting to that can bring genuine grief.

A change in role or identity. Retirement, kids growing up and leaving home, or any shift that changes who you've been. Even good changes can carry a quiet sadness.

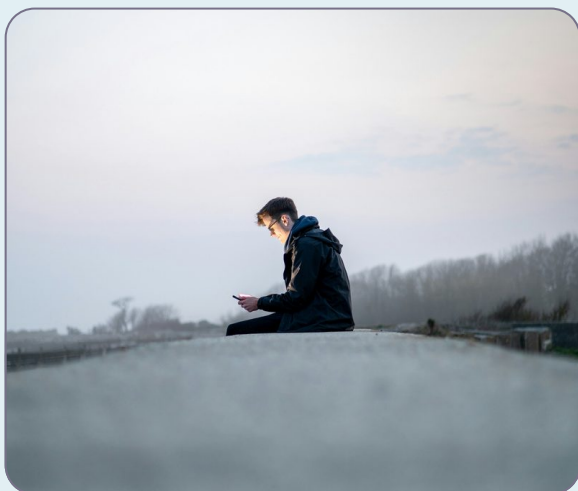
Losing something you owned. This can sound minor, but material loss is real, especially after something like a fire or a natural disaster. We rarely grieve the object itself. We grieve the memories, the people, and the love it represented.



WHAT GRIEF CAN *FEEL LIKE*

Grief doesn't look the same for everyone. You might feel numb, sad, angry, guilty, afraid, or a tangle of all of it at once. It can shift from day to day, or even hour to hour. Your grief is shaped by who you are, by your past, your faith, and by the nature of what you lost. There's no timeline you have to keep and no single right way to do this.

Below are some of the feelings people commonly move through. You may recognize a few, all, or none of them, and any of those is okay.



Shock and Numbness

Right after a loss, many people feel strangely numb, like the news hasn't fully landed yet. This is your mind's way of protecting you from the full weight of it all at once. Numbness and shock are normal, and they don't mean you don't care. This feeling can last a moment or linger for weeks, and it tends to ease on its own as the reality slowly sinks in.

Anger

Anger is a natural part of grieving, even when there's no clear target for it. You might feel helpless, abandoned, or powerless. You might feel angry at yourself, at the situation, at the person you lost, or at God. If that last one feels uncomfortable, know this: **God is big enough to handle your anger, and He already knows it's there.** Anger can give your pain a shape to hold onto while you begin to process everything, and letting yourself feel it is part of moving through it.



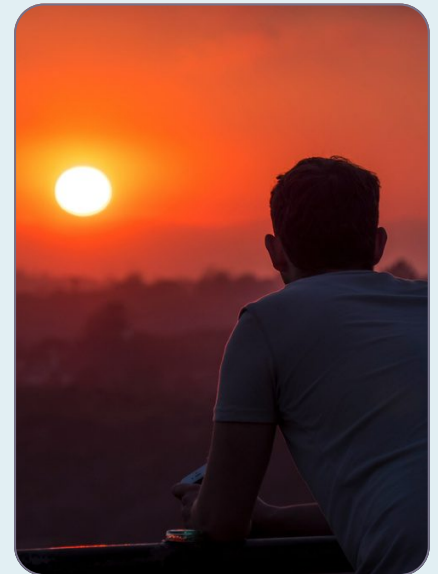


Guilt and “if only”

Grief often comes with a running list of “what ifs” and “if only I had.” You might replay the loss again and again, searching for something you could have done differently. These thoughts are common, and they come from how much you cared. They can also weigh heavy, and carrying guilt over something you couldn’t control can quietly get in the way of healing. Talking these thoughts through with someone you trust can help loosen their grip.

Deep Sadness

As the reality of the loss settles in, deep sadness often follows. This is the part that can feel like a heavy fog: loneliness, emptiness, and a pull to withdraw from the people and things around you. It can show up in your body too, through changes in sleep or appetite, low energy, trouble focusing, or waves of tears that arrive out of nowhere. This is one of the hardest parts of grief, and it’s also one you don’t have to walk through alone. Reaching out to someone, whether a friend, a counselor, or a [Hope Coach](#), can make the load lighter.



Acceptance and a New Normal

Little by little, most people come to a place of acceptance. This doesn’t mean the loss stops mattering, or that you forget. It means you begin to make room for it and adjust to a new normal. Acceptance is where you can start to reinvest, in friendships, in things you love, in new connections, while still carrying the memory of what you lost. In time, those memories can bring more warmth than ache, and you get to hold onto the joy of having had that person, place, or season in your life at all.



Grief Affects Your Body Too

Grief isn't only emotional. It can leave you drained, and it can take a real toll on your body, showing up as fatigue, nausea, a weaker immune system, trouble sleeping, or changes in appetite and weight. Be gentle with yourself, and give your body the rest, care, and patience it needs while you grieve.

When loss comes, letting yourself actually feel it is one of the healthiest things you can do. Grief that gets pushed down doesn't disappear; it tends to find another way out, sometimes as ongoing anxiety or deepening sadness. Moving through grief, even though it's hard, is what allows you to process it and come out the other side.

"The only wrong way to grieve is not to."

What about the **5 STAGES OF GRIEF?**

You've probably heard of the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. It's one of the most well-known ideas about loss, so it's worth understanding where it comes from. A psychiatrist named Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced it in the 1960s, and here's the part most people don't realize: she developed it by studying patients who were facing their own terminal illness, not people grieving the loss of someone else. Over the years it got applied to grief of all kinds, but that wasn't its original purpose.

So if your experience doesn't move neatly from one stage to the next, or skips some altogether, nothing is wrong with you. Grief rarely follows a straight line. Think of these feelings as a description of what you might experience, not a checklist you're supposed to complete.



COPING WITH GRIEF

However you're grieving, taking an active role in caring for yourself helps you heal. There's no rushing this, and there's no prize for doing it fast. **These are simple, gentle ways to look after yourself along the way.**

Let yourself feel it.

Bad days are part of this, and so is feeling several emotions at once. Grief can be a roller coaster, and that's okay. Give yourself permission to feel what's there instead of pushing it down.

Talk to someone when you need to.

It's easy to assume no one really understands, or to close yourself off. But opening up to a friend, a family member, a pastor, or a counselor can make a real difference in sorting through what you're feeling. Reaching out takes courage, and it's worth it.

Care for your body.

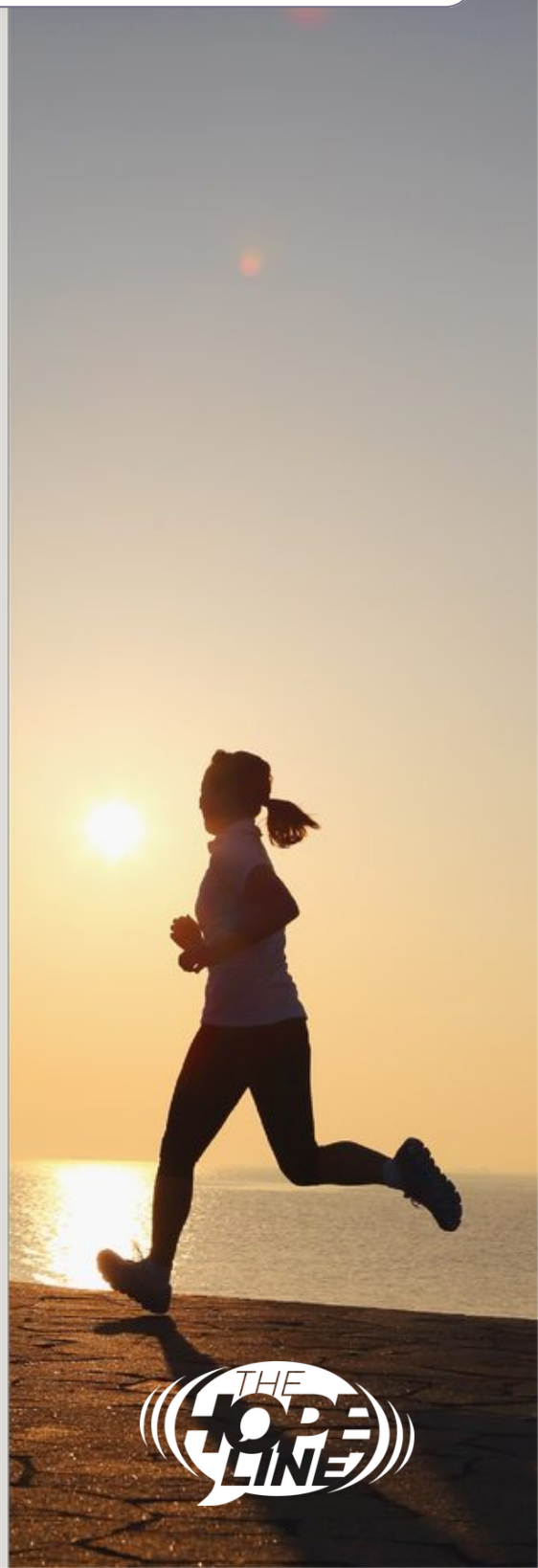
Grief is physically draining. Getting enough sleep, eating nourishing food, and moving your body when you can, all help your body and mind.

Find others who understand.

Find others who understand. Connecting with other people who are grieving can be a real comfort, and you can support one another. A local church or counselor can often help you find a group nearby.

Let people in.

The people who love you often want to help but don't know how. Telling them what you need, even something small, gives them a way to show up for you and lets them be part of your healing.





HELPING A GRIEVING FRIEND OR LOVED ONE

When someone you care about is grieving, it's natural to want to fix their pain or find the perfect words. Here's the freeing truth: you don't have to. You can't take their pain away...that was never your job. What a grieving person needs most is simply someone willing to be there with them in it. Your presence matters more than anything you could say.

Show Up and Keep Showing Up

Don't wait for them to reach out. Check in often. And keep checking in after the first few weeks, when many people drift away and the grieving person can feel most alone.

Say Their Name

Many people are afraid to mention the one who died, worried it will cause more pain. Usually it's the opposite. Ask about them: "Tell me about your dad. What did you love most about him?" Giving someone space to share memories is a gift.

Validate What They're Feeling

Sadness, anger, even anger at God: all of it is allowed. "I can hear how much this hurts" does far more than trying to talk them out of it.

Lead With Care

"I'm so sorry. I don't know what to say, but I'm here" is more than enough. Offer a hug. Sometimes the most comforting thing is to simply sit beside someone in silence.

Listen More Than You Talk

You don't need answers. Let them say whatever they need to say, even when it's messy or angry. Reflect back what you hear, and let them know you're right there with them.



A Few Things That Are Always Okay to Say

"I'm so sorry for your loss."

"I'm here whenever you need me, day or night."

"I don't have the right words, but I care about you."

"Tell me about them. What's your favorite memory?"

"You don't have to be strong right now."

**And sometimes, nothing at all.
Just being there says plenty.**



A Few Things That Tend to Hurt More Than Help

Even with the best intentions, some responses can land the wrong way. Here's what to reach for instead:

Instead of comparing their loss to others' ("at least they lived a long life," "it could be worse"), let their loss be its own. Comparison can send the message that they haven't earned their grief.

Instead of rushing to a silver lining or a Bible verse, sit in the sadness with them first. Even true and comforting words, offered too soon, can feel dismissive. There's a time for encouragement later. Scripture itself makes room for this; Ecclesiastes reminds us there's "a time to weep and a time to mourn."

Instead of "I know exactly how you feel," try "I can't imagine what this is like, but I'm here." Even a similar loss is never quite the same as theirs.

A Spiritual Perspective

Grief and loss can be some of the most devastating experiences life brings. You're not expected to just "get over it" or "move on." And if you've found yourself angry at God, questioning your faith, or wondering how He could let this happen, you're not the first to feel that way, and it's okay.

Here's something worth sitting with: we grieve because we love. Grief is, in a way, the cost of having cared deeply. That ache you feel is a reflection of a real and meaningful connection. It isn't a sign that your faith is failing.

You can be sad, even angry, and still trust God at the same time. The two can hold hands. In fact, the Bible doesn't shy away from grief at all. There's a verse that simply reads, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Jesus understood grief. He felt it Himself, and He meets us in ours. Scripture invites us to "cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Even when you don't feel like it, you can pray something simple and honest: "God, this hurts so much. I don't understand why. But I'm asking you to comfort me and give me peace." As you keep bringing your pain to God, you may find peace beginning to settle in, the kind that runs "deeper than understanding." (Philippians 4:7)



If you want to know more about what it means to have a relationship with God or have questions about the topic of grief, our Hope Coaches are available 24/7 to chat with you about whatever is on your mind.



← **CHAT LIVE
WITH A HOPE
COACH**



THE HOPE LINE

Our mission is to help students and young adults in crisis by offering sound advice and a safe place to connect. Through our online resources and the ability to chat live with a Hope Coach 24/7, we are here to help people make a true connection.

Founded by Dawson McAllister in 1991, TheHopeLine is a 100% donor funded ministry. If you would like to learn more about partnering with us, visit thehopeline.com/partners-in-hope.



TheHopeLine



@thehopeline



@thehopeline



TheHopeLine

