

# **Solitary Paths: The Universal Yet Unique Experience of Grief and Loss**

**By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D**

Experiencing the loss of a loved one is one of life's most challenging ordeals. Undergoing one of the most stressful events can bring unexpected emotional impact, even when anticipating the departure due to illness. Despite the presence of family or friends who share the grief, the journey often feels solitary. Grief is a universal experience, yet each person navigates it uniquely.

There's no prescribed method for grieving – no "right" or "wrong" way. A set timetable or norm for mourning the loss of a parent, spouse, child, or friend doesn't exist. Some may anticipate emotional and psychological symptoms in others but not in themselves, leading to self-blame or a rush to resume everyday life.

The initial shock or emotional numbness is standard, followed by a gradual realization of the overwhelming loss. During this period, disorganization may set in, making everyday tasks challenging. The longing for the person, their contributions, and even their annoying habits becomes palpable. Eventually, a personal balance is restored, allowing for life reorganization and regained focus. Adapting to the absence without disloyalty becomes part of the process.

Anger, a regular aspect of grieving, often finds an indirect outlet. It may direct itself to external factors such as the funeral home, hospital, or even the deceased person for leaving. Expressing anger is natural, and discussing it is essential to prevent harmful actions. Families may experience strain, and blame may surface as a form of acting out. Guilt is also common, with individuals finding reasons to feel responsible for the loss.

Dealing with grief involves granting oneself permission and time to grieve. Open communication about feelings is crucial, while asserting boundaries with those offering well-intended but unhelpful advice is essential. Family culture significantly influences how grief is handled, with diverse approaches to memorializing the departed.

Acknowledging ongoing grief is vital, even when frustration or anger from others arises. Seeking support through grief groups or counseling can be beneficial. Accepting that grieving is a personal process and allowing oneself to feel various emotions without judgment is essential.

Here are some suggestions to navigate the grieving process:

1. Reflect on your favorite memory of the person you lost.
2. Share less painful pictures and talk about the associated events.
3. Reach out to individuals who share comparable experiences of loss.
4. Keep a journal to document your emotions.
5. Educate yourself about grief and loss.
6. Discuss your feelings, including any anger towards God or the deceased.
7. Engage in activities outside yourself, such as volunteering or gardening.
8. Seek help when sorting through the belongings of the dead.
9. Maintain your social life to a comfortable extent.
10. Consider attending a grief support group.
11. Be authentic about your feelings; don't pretend.
12. Acknowledge unexpected waves of grief without self-condemnation.
13. Use this time for self-nurturing.
14. Exercise tolerance when others may offer unhelpful comments, considering their intentions and cultural norms.

You can get through the grief you are experiencing. It just doesn't seem like it right now. Time may not heal grief but it can make it easier to live with.



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Thank You  
For Letting Us Be A Part of Your  
Growth and Recovery  
*Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.*

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