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Grieving After a Loss

“I lost my best friend a year ago and still can’t shake these feelings of grief. Is it normal to grieve so long?”

Grief is a natural response to loss. It’s the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. You may associate grief with the death of a loved one and this type of loss does often cause the most intense grief. But any loss can cause grief, including the breakup of a relationship, loss of health, losing a job, loss of financial stability, death of a pet, a loved one’s serious illness, loss of a friendship or loss of safety after a trauma.

Grief differs based on who you are, who or what you have lost, and how much of your day-to-day life is altered by the loss. A normal reaction to loss, grief is unique in its impact, course and meaning to each of us.

Feelings of grief vary depending on your personality, past experiences, the length of time that has passed since your loss, and the personal importance of that loss to you. When grieving, it is normal to:

- Feel sadness and yearning for the person, object or situation that you have lost. These feelings are central to all grieving.
- Feel worry, anxiety, frustration, confusion, anger or guilt.
- Be overly sensitive to others' behavior.
- React strongly to seemingly minor losses or changes when they trigger feelings of grief over your major loss.
- Feel insecure and alone, and want to isolate yourself from others.
- Feel depressed or overly anxious.

The grieving process takes time. Healing happens gradually; it can’t be forced or hurried and there is no “normal” timetable for grieving. But there are some things you can do to help yourself along the way. Allow yourself time to experience your thoughts and feelings openly to yourself. Acknowledge and accept all feelings, both positive and negative. Use a journal to document the healing process. Confide in a friend or family member; tell them about your loss. Crying offers a release. Expect and accept some reduction in your usual efficiency and consistency. Try to avoid taking on new responsibilities or making major life decisions for a time. There are also many helpful books or websites related to grief; if grief is understood it is easier to handle. Allow yourself to enjoy a few activities, without guilt; feelings can be intense during these times. Allow yourself quiet time. Whatever your grief experience, it’s important to be patient with yourself and allow the process to naturally unfold. If the healing process becomes too overwhelming, seek professional help. Contact your doctor or a mental health professional.