


## FAQ



### Frequently Asked Questions


#### **How long should grieving take?**

There is no timeline. Do not believe anyone who tells you it should take six months, or a year. There is wide variation. Grief takes as long as it takes, but its punch lessens over time.




#### **My spouse doesn't display any emotion and won't talk about it. How can I get him to grieve.**

He is grieving, but has a different style from what you are accustomed to hearing about. Perhaps he is an *instrumental griever* who displays little emotion but works out grief in more linear ways.




#### **How do I find closure?**

Closure is a pop culture term that does not seem very helpful to individual grievers. Instead of seeking closure, practice daily actions that bring you closer to a “new normal.” It is not about turning a corner and finding everything settled, but about working your way through day by day.




#### **My sister seems so sad. It's been a year. Isn't she supposed to get angry before she can move on?**

Not necessarily, as people grieve in different ways and at different paces. The idea that she must move through a stage of anger is outmoded. See if you can help her talk about her experience while you listen without any prescriptions about what she should be doing.




#### **How can you tell the difference between grief and depression?**

It can be very difficult since there is much overlap. A mental health professional is the best person for the job. Of course, any issues that threaten health or safety – inability to eat or sleep, or suicidal thought or impulses should be evaluated by a professional.




**My father died six months ago and my mother still talks to him. Is this healthy?**


The practice of talking to dead loved ones is very common, if rarely acknowledged. It is often a helpful coping mechanism to keep the conversation going, part of holding on to the relationship while adjusting to the physical absence. It would be a problem if accompanied by a delusion that the person is not really dead.

**My dog died and I can't seem to get over it. I feel kind of silly talking about it.**


When others do not take a loss seriously, which is often the case with pet loss, it creates *disenfranchised grief*. You know how real your attachment was to your pet and therefore how real this grief is for you. You may benefit from sharing with other pet lovers who will understand. You may consider making it all the more real by honoring your lost pet with a memorial of some sort, a donation or volunteer activity.

**I feel like God has abandoned me.**


Nothing will test your spiritual beliefs like going through a significant loss. As you are moved to, it will be worth the effort to struggle to a new spiritual understanding. Perhaps loss throws open the door to deeper understandings. Don't feel obligated to accept common platitudes like "God has a plan" or "Your loved one is in a better place" offered as comfort by well-meaning friends, if they don't fit for you. Come to your own conclusions, in your own time.

**Just when I feel like I'm finally making progress, one little thing will trigger me off and I'm back at the beginning, crying and carrying on.**

You aren't back at the beginning, you are just where you are. Grief doesn't march along in an orderly set of stages. It's always there and sometimes leaps out to ambush you just when you don't want it to, like in public. You don't need to criticize yourself or be discouraged. Just know that this is how grief acts, and remember that overall, its strength wanes over time.


**My father was sick for so long, and I was his caregiver for the last two years. I feel guilty because I feel relieved that he finally died.**

There is a name for what you are experiencing – *dual relief* in that you and your dad are now both released from the burden of his illness. Guilt comes in because no one admits to such relief, thinking it is a betrayal. You have every right to feel both your grief and your relief.




**Everybody wants me to go to a support group since my son died. But I don't like groups and I can't stand the thought of talking about him in front of strangers.**


You are the only one who can decide whether and when to go to a support group, but let me tell you some of the potential benefits. In a catastrophic loss like yours, others who have experienced the same thing may actually be easier to talk to than people in your daily life. Even if you went and didn't say a word, you would hear how others are finding their way through. If you eventually decided to share, you would experience the great gift of being heard and understood. If going to a face-to-face group seems impossible, perhaps finding an online chat room of other grieving parents could be a good first step for you.

**I know that losing my job is not nearly as bad as someone dying but it really set me back. I mean, it's only a job, and I can get another one. I should be able to bounce back.**


You can't compare one loss with another and talk yourself out of your feelings. When you lost your job you lost income, security, a part of your identity, contact with people you are used to seeing every day, and probably much else. All of these secondary losses mount up and make the loss harder than you might expect. You will bounce back best if you acknowledge all of those losses and work to meet all those needs in new ways.

**I thought my boyfriend was going to ask me to marry him, but he dumped me instead. I can't stop thinking about him and wondering what went wrong. I can't imagine life without him.**


Clearly you've invested many hopes and dreams in this relationship. Instead of spinning your wheels, turn your attention to learning whatever you can from the relationship and its end. Recognize your own personal growth that took place through the relationship and resolve to keep that. As you are able, you will recast your plans for the future without him in a starring role.

**My best friend's brother committed suicide. I don't know what to say to her.**

There is nothing you can say that will make this okay and no explanation you can offer that will make it make sense. If you can just be there for her to listen and walk with her, you will do more than many friends will be able to. Ask her to tell you how you can be of the most help.


**I had a rocky relationship with my dad and now he died. Now I'll never be able to resolve it.**

It is never too late to address unfinished business, and you use what you have available to you at this point to work on it. You can start by writing a letter to your dad to say all the things you wish you had said face-to-face. Then imagine what he might have said back, on his best day. Gradually work toward a form of the conversation that helps you sort out what you need to.




**I lost my sister ten years ago and kept my feelings to myself so I could help my mom get through it. Now I have to take care of my mom, fulfill my sister's role in the family, and my own. It's too much.**

You fell into a familiar trough – the idea that you can set your own grief aside to ease the way for a loved one, while you pick up the duties of the deceased so as to keep everyone else afloat. It is your turn to attend to your own feelings, and to let the family reorganize around the death of your sister. Seeing an experienced grief counselor may help you find your way.



**How can I tell if my children are grieving properly? They almost don't seem to notice that their dad is gone half the time. But my son is getting in trouble at school which he never did before.**

Children grieve in fits and starts according to their personality, developmental stage, and environment. It is up to all of us who surround children in grief to help them express their feelings of fear and bewilderment and sadness. They may express it through words, or play or behavior. We cannot save them from their grief, nor demand that it look just like ours. Also, we need to let them see our grief which helps them feel less alone.



**I am worried about my friend's drinking. She lost her job and now she can't pay her mortgage, and her best friend moved away. She drinks every day.**

Drinking and drugging are very effective when it comes to temporary pain relief, but they backfire quickly and get in the way of grieving. See what you can do to help her learn more about grief like this and how to get through it.