



Understanding Grief and Loss

The first step in understanding grief and loss is to realize that grief is a natural and essential part of human life, not something to be avoided or ashamed of.

How many of the following losses would you consider a reason for grieving?

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| <input type="checkbox"/> the death of a loved one | <input type="checkbox"/> being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> losing one sock of a favorite pair at the laundromat | <input type="checkbox"/> losing your tomato plants to a freak July frost |
| <input type="checkbox"/> losing your job | <input type="checkbox"/> being convicted of a crime |
| <input type="checkbox"/> the death of a pet | <input type="checkbox"/> retirement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> getting divorced or breaking up | <input type="checkbox"/> getting mugged in a stadium parking lot |
| <input type="checkbox"/> losing a tooth | <input type="checkbox"/> getting a low grade in an important class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> being raped | <input type="checkbox"/> discovering that there's no Santa Claus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> being denied acceptance at a college | <input type="checkbox"/> being prevented from seeing your children or grandchildren |
| <input type="checkbox"/> filing for bankruptcy | <input type="checkbox"/> having a miscarriage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> an automobile accident | <input type="checkbox"/> having your house burglarized |
| <input type="checkbox"/> menopause or middle age | <input type="checkbox"/> losing a friend in military combat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> children leaving home | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> missing a party because you had a cold | |
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If you answered "all of these," you have a better than average understanding of the grief process. Even a small loss can set the natural process of grief and mourning into motion, not just the ones society considers serious.

Five major stages have been recognized in the grieving process. When there's loss of any kind, people experience shock, denial, anger, depression and acceptance. The more serious the loss, the greater the pain and the slower the healing.

Honor your feelings and trust the process. In time, you'll heal in the same way that a broken bone or a wound heals.