

# The Grieving Process



**Grief:** The natural emotional response resulting from a significant loss—especially the death of a loved one.

Everyone deals with grief differently. People cry, laugh, busy themselves with work, throw up, or even feel numb. Some recover quickly, while others take their time. Grief is a natural healing process, and there's no "right" way to do it.

For some people, grief can become *too* painful. It can grow into something totally different, like depression or anxiety. Other times, grief might last far too long, and take over a person's life for years on end. This is called **complicated grief**.



"Normal" grief varies greatly between cultures, people, and situations.



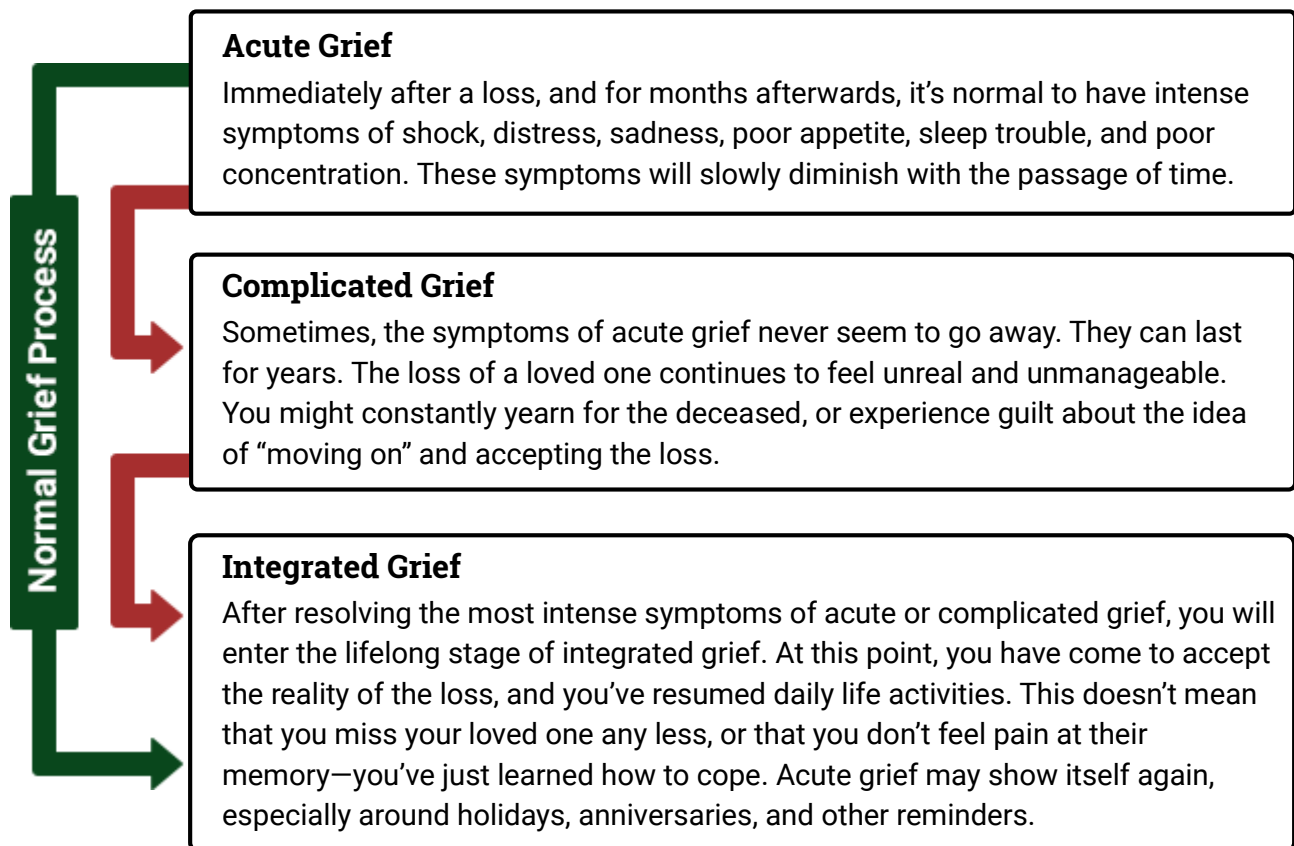
Grief is a natural process, and does not always require treatment.



About 10% of people develop complicated grief after a loss.



Complicated grief can be treated with psychotherapy.



# The Stages of Grief

The Kübler-Ross model of grief (the five stages of grief) describes five primary responses to loss. These stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Someone who is grieving may go through these stages in any order, and they may return to previous stages.

**Denial:** "This can't be happening."

Individuals may refuse to accept the fact that a loss has occurred. They may minimize or outright deny the situation. It is suggested that loved ones and professionals be forward and honest about losses to not prolong the denial stage.

**Anger:** "Why is this happening to me?"

When an individual realizes that a loss has occurred, they may become angry at themselves or others. They may argue that the situation is unfair and try to place blame.

**Bargaining:** "I will do anything to change this."

In bargaining, the individual may try to change or delay their loss. For example, they may try to convince a partner to return after a breakup, or search for unlikely cures in the case of a terminal illness.

**Depression:** "What's the point of going on after this loss?"

At the stage of depression the individual has come to recognize that a loss has occurred or will occur. The individual may isolate themselves and spend time crying and grieving. Depression is a precursor to acceptance because the individual has come to recognize their loss.

**Acceptance:** "It's going to be okay."

Finally, the individual will come to accept their loss. They understand the situation logically, and they have come to terms emotionally with the situation.

# What is Depression?

## Symptoms of a Depressive Episode

depressed mood	loss of interest or pleasure	significant weight change	diminished concentration
sleep difficulties	fatigue nearly every day	feelings of worthlessness	recurring thoughts of death

Symptoms must cause significant distress.

Symptoms must last for at least two weeks.

## Demographics

- Women are 2x more likely to develop depression.
- About 1 in 10 people will experience depression during their lifetime.
- Most people experience their first depressive episode between ages 20 and 30.

## Risks for Depression

- Family history of depression or similar disorders.
- Poverty, unemployment, social isolation, and other stressful life events.
- Regular drug and alcohol use.

## Psychotherapy

(Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)

CBT works by changing self-defeating thoughts and behaviors.

CBT has been found to be equally, if not more effective than medicine in many cases.

CBT is the most researched form of psychotherapy for depression.

## Medication

(Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors)

SSRIs increase the level of serotonin (a chemical related to depression) in the brain.

Studies suggest that SSRIs are the most effective when used to treat severe depression.

SSRIs don't work overnight—it might take up to 6 weeks before they reach their full effect.

A combination of both psychotherapy and medication has been found to be the most effective treatment for depression.

## Other Facts

- Over ½ of those diagnosed with depression also suffer from anxiety.
- 60% of those who commit suicide suffer from depression or a related mood disorder.
- Physical exercise has been found to have a significant antidepressant effect.
- Depressive episodes also occur during bipolar disorder alongside manic episodes.

# Building Happiness

Promotions, new relationships, and even winning the lottery will give you only a temporary boost in happiness. Each person has a baseline level of happiness that they quickly return to. Sustained happiness takes work. Listed below are exercises that, when practiced frequently, can build genuine and lasting happiness.

**Gratitudes:** Write down three things for which you are grateful every day. Don't worry if they seem simple or mundane—just get something down on paper. Writing gratitudes will help you identify positive aspects of even the worst days.

**Acts of kindness:** Make a conscious effort to do something nice for no reason other than to help. You might be surprised how a simple act of kindness can turn around the day for both you and the kindness recipient.

**Exercise:** The positive effects of exercise are astounding. Physically active people have increased energy, superior immune systems, and a frequent sense of accomplishment. Exercise can reduce insomnia, stimulate brain growth, and even act as an anti-depressant. If jogging or lifting weights seems like too much, don't be afraid to start with a 30 minute walk or a slow bike ride.

**Meditation:** Research has linked meditation with reduced anxiety and more positive emotions. Those who meditate regularly may even permanently restructure their brains to create sustained happiness.

**Positive journaling:** Take some time to write about positive events in your life. Write about a fun day spent with friends, a good movie, or an activity you enjoyed. Positive journaling will get you into the habit of focusing on the positive.

**Fostering relationships:** Strong social connections are thought to be one of the most powerful influences on our mood. Those who are dedicated to spending time with friends and family show the highest levels of happiness. If you can't see your loved ones every day you can still send an email or make a phone call. If it feels like you *never* see your loved ones, schedule time that can be dedicated to them.

# The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise

Research has shown us that people who exercise regularly tend to be more resistant to many mental illnesses. Exercise can help treat current symptoms, and prevent future episodes.

## What problems can exercise help with?

### Mental Illness

Depression  
Anxiety  
Substance Abuse  
Bulimia  
Alzheimer's Disease

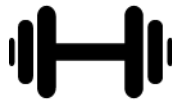
### Other

Sleep Difficulties  
Stress  
Physical Health  
Low Energy  
Self-Esteem

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Beginning an exercise plan doesn't have to be difficult. Walking for as little as 30 minutes, 3 times a week, has been found to be beneficial. Don't worry too much about what exercise you choose. Aerobic and anaerobic exercises are both effective at improving mental health.

### Anaerobic Exercises



Weightlifting  
Sprinting (running, biking, etc.)  
Interval training  
Climbing

### Aerobic Exercises



Walking, jogging, or biking  
Elliptical or ski machines  
Swimming  
Dancing

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If you're crunched for time, you might still be able to squeeze some exercise into your day. Two 15 minute walks work just as well as one 30 minute walk! Here are some tips to help:



Need to make a phone call? Walk and talk.

Get an exercise partner to hold you accountable.

Park at the back of the parking lot and walk.

Do an activity you enjoy, and it won't be a chore.

Skip the elevator and take the stairs.

Head outside for 10 minutes during lunch.

# Mindfulness Skills

Spending a lot of time in your head causes stress. There are always new things to worry about, conversations to rehearse, and activities to plan. Research tells us that when you live in the moment--that is, getting out of your head and being consciously aware of your surroundings--you will usually feel happier and experience less stress. With enough practice, you will learn to better control your thoughts and feelings. Below are some techniques to help you achieve this goal.

## Mindful Activity

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The goal of a *mindful activity* is to bring your thoughts into the present moment. To practice, first choose any activity where you notice your mind consistently wanders. This could be your commute home, while completing chores around the house, or just about anything else. Next time you do your chosen activity, attend to each of your senses. Below we use the example of going for a walk. It will be best to choose an activity you do regularly so you are sure to practice every day.

Vision	As you leave your home you immediately notice the bright blue sky, trees, and empty streets. As you pay closer attention you notice flowers along the sidewalk with a slight breeze causing them to tilt to their side every few moments.
Hearing	Each time the breeze passes, you can hear the leaves rustling in the wind. Occasionally, you hear the hum of a car passing on a nearby street. Birds are chirping somewhere up above.
Touch	You notice the warmth of the sun and the coolness of the breeze. With each step you feel your foot landing and then pushing off from the pavement.
Taste	You stop to pick up a coffee for your walk. You hold the drink in your mouth for a moment to savor the taste.
Smell	When the breeze floats by, you catch the smell of the flowers and the trees. As you continue your walk, you notice the smell of freshly cut grass by a neighboring home.

# Mindfulness Skills

## Mindful Meditation

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When you go about your life, it's normal for thoughts, feelings, and experiences to come and go quickly, oftentimes outside of your awareness. You might say or do something because of how you feel, without noticing the processes that influenced you. During mindfulness meditation you will create awareness of these processes by mentally taking a step back from yourself and identifying your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations.

- 1 Find a place free of too much noise or distraction to practice.
- 2 Sit down on a cushion, the floor, or in a chair. You want to sit up straight to allow easy breathing, but not so straight that you're uncomfortable.
- 3 Turn your focus toward your breathing. Notice the feeling of the breath entering your body and making its way to your lungs. Pay attention to how your body feels, and what it's like as your breath exits your lungs. Continue to focus on the feeling of breathing.
- 4 As you practice, your mind will wander. Try not to judge your thoughts-- simply accept that they are happening. Notice, as an outside observer: "I'm having a thought." The same goes for feelings. If you detect sadness, worry, happiness, or excitement, notice how they feel in your body. Acknowledge what you are feeling, even if it's an uncomfortable sensation. Simply notice: "I am feeling this way."
- 5 When the thought or feeling passes, return your focus to your breathing and your body.
- 6 Try to practice for at least 10 to 15 minutes. If you are more experienced, aim for 30 minutes.

# Distress Tolerance Skills

## Distraction (A.C.C.E.P.T.S.)

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Negative feelings will usually pass, or at least lessen in intensity over time. It can be valuable to distract yourself until the emotions subside. The acronym "A.C.C.E.P.T.S." serves as a reminder of this idea.

<b>A</b> ctivities	Engage in activities that require thought and concentration. This could be a hobby, a project, work, or school.
<b>C</b> ontributing	Focus on someone or something other than yourself. You can volunteer, do a good deed, or do anything else that will contribute to a cause or person.
<b>C</b> omparisons	Look at your situation in comparison to something worse. Remember a time you were in more pain, or when someone else was going through something more difficult.
<b>E</b> motions	Do something that will create a competing emotion. Feeling sad? Watch a funny movie. Feeling nervous? Listen to soothing music.
<b>P</b> ushing Away	Do away with negative thoughts by pushing them out of your mind. Imagine writing your problem on a piece of paper, crumpling it up, and throwing it away. Refuse to think about the situation until a better time.
<b>T</b> houghts	When your emotions take over, try to focus on your thoughts. Count to 10, recite a poem in your head, or read a book.
<b>S</b> ensations	Find safe physical sensations to distract you from intense negative emotions. Wear a rubber band and snap it on your wrist, hold an ice cube in your hand, or eat something sour like a lime.



# Emotion Regulation Skills

## P.L.E.A.S.E.

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Your body and mind are closely linked, and the health of one directly affects the other. An unhealthy body will make it difficult to manage your emotions. The acronym “P.L.E.A.S.E.” can be used to help you remember important aspects of this connection.

PL	Treat Physical Illness
E	Eat Healthy
A	Avoid Mood-Altering Drugs
S	Sleep Well
E	Exercise

## Paying Attention to Positive Events

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It's only human—most people give more attention to the bad things than the good. If you hear ten compliments, and a single criticism, you'll probably focus on the criticism.

If you notice yourself focusing on the negative aspects of an experience, try to stop and refocus on the positive. Practice by doing a small positive activity every day while making a point to acknowledge the good parts (even if things aren't perfect). Don't let minor problems ruin the moment.

Adding one or two positive activities won't change your life, but over time the happiness they create will start to add up. Here are a few ideas for quick positive activities to get you started:

Have a good, unrushed meal.	Watch a movie.	Visit with friends or family.
Visit a local attraction like a zoo or museum.	Go for a walk.	Put on headphones and do nothing but listen to music.
Have a picnic.	Give yourself a relaxing night in.	Try a new hobby.