

HOW LONG DOES THIS GRIEF JOURNEY LAST?

We are unique individuals. Everything we do and all of our experiences are never the same as anyone else's experiences. This is also the case on the grief and bereavement journey. What will happen for one person may not happen for another. The feelings and perceptions of one parent may not be the same for the other parent and so on.

There are some factors, however, that will have an influence on how the grief journey progresses.

1. What was your relationship with the person who died like?

Sometimes, it is a relief when someone dies because the relationship was troubled or abusive. Sometimes, that person was the only one who understood and supported you and now you feel very alone and afraid. There may have been some unfinished business that now can never be resolved. Whatever the situation, this will influence your grief and bereavement journey.

2. Was the death sudden or anticipated?

Did the person die suddenly so there was no time to prepare? Sudden death may extend the grieving period if it was random, violent or seen as preventable. This situation now involves a traumatic situation that may require professional counseling.

Did you know that they were going to die? If the death was anticipated, you may have had a chance to discuss the issues that needed discussing and then came to an understanding.

3. How were you involved with the death?

Did you witness a violent or preventable death? How were you told about the death? The answers to these questions may reveal that you were traumatized as well as bereaved which again means other support may be needed.

4. What else is happening in your life?

If you are experiencing other losses such as illness, moving, divorce, job or school changes, or stress, you have multiple losses to deal with at once. This may be overwhelming and difficult to manage. Getting emotional support can really help.

5. How did you deal with other losses you have had?

If you chose not to think about previous losses, this one may trigger a larger response because you are grieving all the losses at the same time. If you had not dealt with previous losses, eventually one loss will bring it all to a head.

6. What support do you have in place?

It is very difficult to grieve alone. The main reason for that is because grieving is telling the story of the loss. If you don't have other people to tell the story to, you may find it difficult to move along the grief and bereavement journey.

7. What did the dying person want after their death?

Sometimes dying people think that they are being kind by asking their family to not go to the trouble of having a funeral. They also may say, "Now I don't want you to go around moping after I'm gone!" or "Don't cry over me." What they don't realize is that they are placing pressure on these griever's to not grieve which is like asking the sun not to rise. People will grieve when someone they love dies.

8. **What is your expectation of your grief journey?**

Often we hope that we will be over our grief in a few weeks or months. Unless we have experienced loss before, we won't know that the grief journey is often intense, never simple and is not ever over. Things will get better in our lives. There will come a time when we can get through a day without crying or thinking of the person with longing but we will never forget them or the experience.

All or some of these factors will shape your grief journey. The answers to these questions may help you to return to functioning in a way that puts some energy back into your life. It is very helpful to reach out for support from friends, family or the community during bereavement.