

# The Truth about Grief and Loss

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Lauren was frightened. She considered herself to be a resilient, “no-nonsense” woman. Since the death of her dad, however, she had fallen apart, and feared that she wouldn’t be able to put herself back together.

As Lauren moved through the grieving process she began to understand that her reactions were normal. In the course of her therapy we addressed a number of commonly asked questions about grief and loss:

- **What is loss?** When we speak of grieving and loss we often think of death. However, there are many other kinds of loss, including divorce, illness or loss of a job. What is particularly surprising is that any change — even positive change — involves loss. Getting promoted or married are changes that we think of as positive, but these changes also involve elements of loss.
- **What is grief?** Grief is the inevitable process we experience as the result of a loss. Grief involves a series of stages including denial or disbelief, fear, anger, depression, and finally acceptance. These stages may overlap, or come in a different order. During this process we may experience myriad emotions, such as confusion, sadness, fear, guilt or hopelessness. These feelings will vary in intensity according to the size or extent of a given loss.
- **How can I best heal after a loss?** There is no one right way to grieve. Everyone’s experience of grief is unique. In the words of author Anne Morrow Lindberg, “... suffering ... no matter how multiplied, is always individual.” There are some general guidelines, however, that will allow you to mend more quickly and completely:
  - Remember that no matter how much pain you may feel, you will survive your loss.
  - Emotional ups and downs are a normal part of any grieving process. Here’s the paradox: In order to get past the difficult feelings, you must experience them.
  - Don’t try to speed up or avoid the process. If you do, you will not heal properly. Your grieving will have been incomplete, and your energy to deal with the present will remain bound to the past.
  - Care for yourself as if you are caring for a dear friend. Rest, eat well (even if you aren’t hungry), and exercise (even if you don’t want to). Avoid other changes and don’t make big decisions unless you absolutely must.
  - Ask those you love and trust for support. You don’t have to face this alone.
  - Write about your loss. Journaling will bring your unexpressed emotions to the surface, thereby encouraging the grieving process to move along.
  - Create your own ritual. Most cultures have ceremonies to mark death. A ritual marking any loss helps us to acknowledge that the loss is real. It is a way to honor the loss, and to separate the past from the present. When faced with any kind of a loss, feel free to create any kind of ceremony that holds meaning for you.
- **There are actually gifts in loss?** When a painful loss first occurs it is impossible to imagine that anything good could come from it. With time and perspective, however, you may be able to see something positive. You may be able to appreciate good times more than ever before. Or you may have an increased respect for your own strength and resilience. Most important, you can better empathize with others as a result of your own experience.

Loss is an inevitable part of everyday life. Understanding how to better cope with small losses prepares us to effectively grieve for major ones.