

Coping with Loss and Grief

When you have experienced a loss it is common to have changes in the way you think, feel and behave. Grief is a common experience when you lose someone or something that is important to you. The intensity and how you express of your grief can shift over time and in different situations. Here are some signs to watch for and ways to manage coping with loss and grief.

Watch for changes:

| Behaviour | Thinking | Feelings |
|---|---|---|
| Crying more than usual | Denial | Anger |
| Lack of energy level | Remembering, paying attention or focusing | Anxiety |
| Eating or sleeping patterns | Time spent on thinking about loss or idolizing the loss | Envy at seeing others |
| Feeling unwell without cause | Searching for reasons for the loss | Increased sadness or depression |
| Relationship problems – withdrawal from people, activities or interests | Dwelling on mistakes and regrets, real or imagined | Low or flat mood |
| Productivity and motivation | | Confused |
| Agitation | | Hypersensitivity (getting upset easily over small things) |
| Need for reassurance from others | | Feeling on edge |
| Avoiding situations | | |

Tips:

Changes related to grief and loss can come in many different forms such as the loss of a relationship through death, loss of body function or normal lifestyle changes. Here are some tips to help when coping with cancer-related losses.

- Go ahead and feel the pain of the loss and express your feelings in a safe place. Let yourself cry. This helpful for healing.
- Be patient and don't pressure yourself with too many expectations.
- Accept that you need to go through your own healing in your own time.

- Keep from judging your feelings or comparing yourself to others.
- Accept support from other people and tell people what you need from them. Talk about your loss, your memories, and your life before your loss.
- Make hopeful plans for the future.
- Forgive yourself for all the things you said, did not say or do. Learn to let go!
- Stay away from major life changes (such as moving homes, changing jobs, starting or ending relationships) while having a recent loss.
- Try to keep up your normal routines as much as possible. Routine gives you a sense of safety in some parts of your life.
- Take care of your body. Eat well and exercise. Give yourself comfort in small ways such as hot baths, relaxation and favourite foods.
- Give yourself a break from the grief. It is healthy to find fun distractions like going to a movie, listening to music or reading a good book.
- Holidays and anniversaries can be extremely difficult prepare ahead and plan how you want to spend your time and with whom.

Resources:

- Patient & Family Counselling Services at a Cancer Centre - call for an appointment
- Canadian Virtual Hospice at www.virtualhospice.ca
- Cancer Chat Canada – sign up for a professional led online support group at <https://cancerchat.desouzainstitute.com/> or call toll-free 1-844-725-2476
- BC Cancer Library resources at www.bccancer.bc.ca