

## Grief and Mourning

Many people use the words, grief and mourning interchangeably, when actually they have distinct meanings.

**Grief** involves the many reactions we have to a loss. This may include sleep and appetite disturbances, difficulty concentrating, problems with decision-making, intense and varied emotions, social withdrawal, loss of interest in things that were once enjoyed, etc. As you can see from this short list, grief reactions can greatly impact your day-to-day functioning.

**Mourning** involves adjusting to your loss over time. It involves changing yourself to fit your new reality. This includes changing the way you see yourself, your life, and the world. Mourning also involves developing a new relationship to the person who died—a relationship of memory. Developing a new identity and bringing the past together with the present are also tasks of mourning, along with reconstructing a new meaning in your life.

Grief involves the many reactions one has to a loss. Mourning involves changing oneself to fit new circumstances. Except for occasional and temporary upsurges, grief eventually comes to an end and normal functioning returns. (This normal functioning may be completely different from the way you used to function, but it still can be seen as normal—a new normal.) Mourning can be life-long. For example, mourning may occur when a woman gets married and doesn't have her father to walk her down the aisle. Even if he died years earlier, and she has moved forward in her life with much happiness, she may re-experience his absence in a new way as her wedding approaches, as she faces his death all over again from this new perspective. The same is true for a widower who has made a good adjustment to living alone, but then develops a chronic illness. He may confront his loss all over again, as he deals with his illness alone. If he always believed that his wife would survive him, he must now readjust to the reality that she is dead and cannot help care for him. At times such as these when we must readjust to the loss of someone loved, it is not unusual to experience upsurges of grief all over again.

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