

The Classic Symptoms of Grief



Listed here are a few of the classic symptoms, both physical and mental, that people coping with grief seem to have in common. Anyone dealing with loss should be aware of the fact that our bodies will often react to the mental stresses of bereavement...

Weight loss/weight gain – The onset of grief often robs you of your appetite, and this may result in a noticeable weight loss. On the flip side, eating can also become your new source of comfort and this can cause you to gain weight. These fluctuations are normal. Try to practice a healthy diet, but don't stress over your weight. When your coping skills improve, your ability to take control of your appetite will too.

Frequent illness – Grief can wreak havoc on your immune system; illness may become something you can't outrun. Colds, hives, back pain, chest pains, sleeplessness, fatigue, and shaking hands are a few of the health issues that surface in the bereaved. None of this is uncommon, but that doesn't mean you should ignore these symptoms if you

experience them. Always get anything out of the ordinary checked out by your physician. Just be aware that these are a few of the common ailments people experience during the grief process.

Inability to concentrate and lack of memory – Lack of concentration and forgetfulness can be frustrating; these issues may become more acute during the grief process. Sticky notes can become very useful tools. Stock up, and use them freely to help keep track of daily responsibilities. If your mind starts jumping all over the place, don't be too alarmed – friends will help you muddle through. For many, losing the ability to recall memories of the deceased can be the hardest part. Don't panic – When you start to relax, your memory will gradually come back to you.

Guilt and constant **mind traffic** are standard symptoms for anyone dealing with suicide, but they are *not limited* to suicide. All of the "could haves, should haves, and would haves" can drive a person crazy. Putting all guilt driven thoughts down on paper helps to control them, and then they can be addressed one at a time. Mind traffic is the inner voice working through guilt on a continuous loop. Sometimes the only way to stop that noise is to focus on the *Serenity Prayer*:

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference"
~ Reinhold Niebuhr.

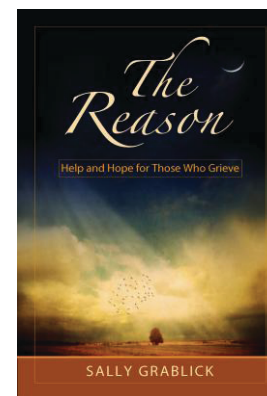
Parental paranoia – It is natural to become overly protective after the loss of a child; but the fact remains that you cannot lock your surviving children up in their rooms to avoid tragedy. Instead, put several safeguards into place to better monitor their whereabouts and take the time to explain why it is so important for them to follow the rules. Children aren't stupid – they'll understand. You will find that being open and honest about your grief will make it easier to cope with death as a family unit.

*** Sibling grief

Siblings tend to get lost in the grief process, because people tend to focus on the parents when a child dies. The truth is that our siblings often know us best. They see the unrestricted side of our personalities; the part we are free to express when away from the prying eyes of our parents. Your living children (adolescence, teens, and young adults) may begin to approach things with a larger-than-life exuberance. The invisible weight of their dead sibling often drives the need to experience everything – not only for themselves, but for their lost loved one. Parental paranoia adds to the burden they already bear, and this makes being a surviving child possibly the most difficult job of all. Being aware of these facts will enable both parents and siblings to cope as they adjust to their new family dynamic. (Recommended reading for siblings struggling to understand their grief: The Empty Chair, by Elizabeth DeVita-Raeburn)

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