

GRIEF: IT'S MORE THAN just boo-hooing

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We see it all the time, especially in movies: Someone has just experienced the death of a loved one and they are crying, upset, sad, perhaps inconsolable. Yet, here they are in the next scene all better. No tears, no sad looks and certainly no mention of the deceased.

As you read this, you are probably thinking the same thing that my wife says when I point out this sudden apparent change from grief to everything's just fine—she turns to me and says, “It’s just a movie.”

True, but in hundreds of movies we see the same thing:

DEATH → GRIEF REACTIONS → ALL BETTER → NO MENTION OF DECEASED

I’ve met thousands of people who’ve experienced the death of a loved one. I’m not exaggerating: thousands. People who’ve suffered the death of parents, siblings, children, grandparents, spouses, relatives and friends. Some were ten or twenty years out. For others, it was yesterday.

What I learned from these folks (and my own losses as well) was a critical fact that we all need to remember:

Grief is complex—it is a whole bunch of reactions,
some of which are short-lived while others last a lifetime.

So, sometime ago I sat down and began compiling reactions to the death of a loved one. I remember thinking, “Okay, maybe 15 or 20. Thirty at the most.”

By the time I was “done,” I ended up with a list of 65 grief reactions.

I put *done* in quotes because there are surely more—perhaps upwards of 100. Who knows?

I've put the list into five categories:

1. **Mind** (Cognitive)
2. **Heart** (Emotional)
3. **Spiritual**
4. **Other People** (Social)
5. **Physical** (Somatic).

As you look over the list, you might find yourself saying, *I experienced several of these after my loved one died, but that was years ago.*

No one experiences all of the reactions and most of these do fade with time. But, I'm willing to bet that most everyone experiences at least a few of these reactions most of their life.

So, here it is—my list.



65 COMMON GRIEF REACTIONS

HEART

- ◆ Shock
- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Pain
- ◆ Fear
- ◆ Helplessness
- ◆ Anger
- ◆ Guilt
- ◆ Sadness/depression
- ◆ Grief attacks
- ◆ Lousy
- ◆ Empty
- ◆ Lost

MIND

- ◆ Denial
- ◆ Unreality
- ◆ Time distortion
- ◆ Avoidance
- ◆ Searching
- ◆ Longing and missing

- ◆ Loss of shared knowledge structure
- ◆ Multiple reminders
- ◆ Concentration problems
- ◆ Memory problems
- ◆ Obsessive thoughts
- ◆ Rituals
- ◆ Confusion
- ◆ Altered sense of the future
- ◆ Desire to obtain more information
- ◆ Social disruption
- ◆ Dreams & nightmares
- ◆ Altered beliefs
- ◆ Loss of role
- ◆ Continued questions

SPIRITUAL

- ◆ God
- ◆ Meaning of life

- ◆ Altered sense of just world
- ◆ Altered sense of immortality
- ◆ Hopelessness
- ◆ Afterlife beliefs

OTHER PEOPLE

- ◆ Feeling isolated
- ◆ Feeling cursed
- ◆ Pain for other loved ones
- ◆ Overwork
- ◆ Job strains
- ◆ Avoiding others
- ◆ Family role changes
- ◆ Individual grieving differences
- ◆ Communication problems
- ◆ Withdrawal
- ◆ Family changes

PHYSICAL

- ◆ Crying
- ◆ Gastrointestinal disturbances
- ◆ Loss of weight
- ◆ Sleep problems
- ◆ Sighing/Shortness of breath
- ◆ Lack of strength
- ◆ Physical exhaustion/lack of energy
- ◆ Feelings of heaviness
- ◆ Feelings of emptiness
- ◆ Feeling of something stuck in throat
- ◆ Diminished immune system response
- ◆ Heart palpitations
- ◆ Nervousness/tension/restlessness
- ◆ Increased risk behaviors
- ◆ Sexual desire decrease or increase
- ◆ Searching for something to do