

# DOES GRIEF EVER REALLY GO AWAY?

## Part 1

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Of course you know the answer to the question in the title. In this article I want to review many of the ways that grief does not go away.

When you approach people who've not experienced a significant death in their life, especially the death of a child, grandchild or sibling, and ask, "How can you tell if someone is in grief?" you often get answers such as, "They're crying, they look sad, they talk about their loved one, they aren't themselves, they seem out of it."

Okay, fair enough. But what do these same people think when these symptoms are not visible? For many people, they breathe a sigh of relief that the bereaved person is *over* their grief or has *moved on* with their life.

Several years ago, I did an analysis of the media (radio, TV, newspapers) and found that journalists like to use terms like *closure*, *healed*, *accept*, or *recover* when talking about a person who has experienced a death. However, these are not terms that bereaved people typically use.

**The media's use of these words only adds to the myth that we get *over* a death.**

Because grief is such a complicated array of reactions, it would be amazing if any bereaved person someday totally had closure, healed, accepted, and recovered.



Several years ago, with input from bereaved people, I put together a beginning list of grief reactions by classifying them into five categories:

1. Mind
2. Heart
3. Spiritual
4. Other People
5. Physical

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In this article we will look at the Mind category and see how some of these grief reactions can last a lifetime. In future articles we'll examine the other four categories.

See if you have found yourself experiencing any of the reactions listed below. If so, well, then—that's grief. You may want to give this article to someone to help them further understand how you never will really be "over it."

Read the grief reactions below along with the statements people say, and check the ones that still apply to you today:

## MIND

- Denial.** "I still can't believe that s/he is gone."
- Unreality.** "Sometimes this just feels so unreal."
- Time distortion.** "At times it feels so long ago and yet other times it feels like yesterday."
- Avoidance.** "There are people, places or things that I still avoid since the death."
- Searching.** "I still find myself searching for this person."
- Longing and missing.** "I still miss him (or her) being in my life."
- Loss of shared communication.** "I don't have the person who shared my ideas or little inside jokes with me."
- Multiple reminders.** "Everywhere I look reminds me of my loss."
- Concentration issues.** "I still have problems focusing on things."
- Memory problems.** "Since the death my memory is still not what it used to be."
- Obsessive thoughts.** "I keep having the same thoughts of my loved one over and over."

- Rituals.** "There are things I still feel I need to do in recognition of my loved one."
- Confusion.** "I'm still confused about many things related to the death."
- Altered sense of the future.** "I don't look forward to the future anymore."
- Desire to obtain more information.** "There is still a lot about the death I want to know."
- Disruption of social clock.** "It is wrong that my child (or grandchild) died before me."
- Dreams and nightmares.** "I still dream about her (or him)."
- Loss of role.** "Since the death, I wonder who I am anymore."

These are just some of the mind reactions that people can have for a lifetime. How many did you check? Don't worry if you checked many or a few. There is not a score to add up.

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The death of your child, grandchild, or brother or sister is something that has forever changed your life.

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Therefore, while the pain lessens, coping with the many aspects of grief is a lifelong process.

Yola, one of the original Seattle TCF moms put it so well when she talked about the grief of her son after 20 years. She said, "You know, Dr. Bob, grief is unfinished love."

Yes, Yola, you are so right.