

Navigating Loss

Most definitions of grief focus on the death of a loved one. While death is one possible cause of grief, many other major changes can also cause feelings of grief and loss. Grief can come on suddenly, such as when a loved one dies or another event occurs unexpectedly. Other times the grieving process starts even before the loss takes place, called anticipatory grief. It could last for months or years leading up to the loss. When a loved one is ill, you might grieve the person they used to be or the relationship you used to have with them. Since loss and change are a natural part of living, everyone experiences grief at some point in their lives. Though the grief process has common stages, everyone's journey through it is personal. Here are some tools that can help you as you learn to live with the loss, no matter where you are on your individual journey.

Knowing the stages of grief

Being familiar with the common stages of grief can help you better understand and manage the various emotions that come and go as you cope with a loss. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, a famous psychiatrist, first introduced a model with the different stages of grief in 1969.

The five stages include:

- **Denial**—This can't be happening.
- **Anger**—Why is this happening to me? Who is to blame?
- **Bargaining**—If only....I would do anything for this not to be happening....
- **Depression**—I don't feel like doing anything.
- **Acceptance**—I accept what is happening or what has happened.

The grief process does not necessarily occur in a fixed order. You may experience one stage repeatedly and not experience others at all. As Kubler-Ross said, "There is no typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grieving is an individual as our lives." The main benefit of the model is to help you understand that grief is a continual processing of feelings over time.

Factors that influence your reactions

There is no right or wrong way to grieve or to adjust to how your life has changed. You will likely experience grief in waves—some days you may feel at peace and other days may be harder.

Many other factors can also your reaction to a loss, such as:

- Context of the loss (whether it was anticipated/unexpected/tragic)
- Nature of your relationship to the lost person/place/situation/pet
- Prior experiences with loss
- Overall stability at the time of the loss
- Available support networks/resources
- Individual coping style

Where mindfulness and gratitude fit in

It is hard to prepare for a loss that you know is coming or inevitable. Even when life seems to be going smoothly, you might struggle with worry or anxiety about losing something or someone. Positive psychology researchers believe that the greatest insurance is to live your life fully in the moment, savor the time you have with your loved ones, and practice being grateful for what you do have on a regular basis. This serves as a protective mechanism because then when you do experience a loss, you will at least know you lived those moments to the fullest and enjoyed the time you had with your loved ones. Alternatively, if you spend your time worrying about what might happen or dwelling on how you are going to lose someone someday, you will end up compounding your grief. You'll be grieving wasted time in addition to the loss itself.

Allow yourself space to grieve

One of the most important steps in coping with grief is simply allowing yourself to feel your emotions. It is okay to feel however you feel. You might feel happy one moment and then something reminds you of your loss, and you suddenly feel overcome with sadness. Have some compassion for yourself. However, you are feeling is completely normal and part of the process.

Take care of yourself

What is it you need right now? This could be as simple as eating your favorite meal, getting extra sleep, getting some exercise, or scheduling a checkup with your doctor. Though grief can be overwhelming at times, don't forget to check in with yourself and take time for whatever it is you need in that moment.

Using and finding support

You might have the urge to isolate when you are grieving, but it is important to have social support during this time. Talk to friends or family about how you're feeling. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it, such as with light housework or meals. For certain losses, it might be helpful to join a support group with others who have gone through a similar experience. Seek professional help if you are struggling to perform your typical daily activities or feel as if life isn't worth living.

Returning to a sense of normalcy

Experiencing a major loss can interfere with your daily functioning and schedule. Once you feel ready, try to start getting back into your usual activities and restart your routine. This can help you build momentum and remember your purpose in life. There is not necessarily a definite end date when it comes to grief—you might never stop grieving a significant loss. However, you can learn tools to help you cope with and honor your loss. Though life will be different after you experience a loss, it is important to take care of yourself, focus on your purpose, and make the most of each day.

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Mental Health Awareness Month

As a student, it can be especially difficult to manage your mental health while juggling schoolwork and other responsibilities. Here are some tips for prioritizing your mental health so you can deal with stressful times more effectively and feel better overall.

Stick to a routine.

Sticking to a routine can improve your mental health by fostering a sense of purpose. Figure out what works for you: Plan out your day with a schedule or create a to-do list. It can be as detailed or as general as you prefer.

Make time for self-care.

It is important to recharge your batteries by incorporating downtime and self-care into your schedule. Give yourself permission to relax, even for a half hour each day. Ideas for self-care include reading, practicing an art, meditating, yoga, exercise, or spending time with friends.

Focus on the present moment.

Practicing mindfulness can be beneficial for your overall mental health. If you tend to have worry thoughts, bring your attention back to the current moment.

Connect with others.

Stay connected with family and friends by checking in regularly. You can also get involved in your campus and local community by attending a class or meetup. Doing a small act of kindness can brighten someone's day and help you feel good as well.

Make time for movement.

Try to incorporate movement into your daily routine. When struggling with mental illness, you might not feel motivated to do much. However, even some light stretching, going for a walk, or anything that gets your blood flowing can help you feel better mentally and physically.

Prioritize sleep.

Don't skimp on sleep, which can contribute to feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression. Your body and mind need adequate rest each night in order to function properly.

Seek professional support.

Don't be afraid to take the first step and get the help of a professional counselor. Check out what services are available on your college campus. Online therapy is also becoming a popular option.

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Helping Employees of the Sandwich Generation

The “Sandwich Generation” is comprised of working adults, typically in their 30's, 40's, and 50's, who are sandwiched between raising children and caring for aging parents. These individuals often feel overwhelmed by these two demands, and find it difficult to balance being a caregiver, a parent, and an employee.

Today, more than two-thirds of women with children under the age of 18 are in the workforce, and up to one-third of workers in the U.S. are caregivers for older relatives. The Sandwich Generation is growing, so it is important for employers to pay attention and find ways they can help.

Know that employees of the Sandwich Generation are typically concerned about the following things:

- Finding good child care providers, home health care services, retirement homes, and other child and elder care services.
- Having alternative work schedules that allow them to telecommute or leave work when needed to deal with family issues.
- Finding ways to ease health problems and stress caused by burnout.
- Trying to incorporate relaxation techniques and exercise into their lives.
- Discovering how to heal strained relationships with family members, and how to be better parents and caregivers.

Employers can step forward and give assistance to the Sandwich Generation; in turn, the company will have workers that can operate more effectively and productively because their outside-of-work needs are being met.

Employers can consider:

- Offering employees telecommuting, job-sharing, or other alternative work week options.
- Offering referrals to child care and elder care service providers.
- Giving crisis management services or how-to-handle-stress workshops.
- Teaching workers about EAP programs and related benefits that the organization offers.
- Training managers to be sensitive to workers' needs, so that they may be creative in helping employees balance their family and their work.

Written by Life Advantages - Author Dr. Delvina Miremadi ©2024

Webinar Now Available:

Living With Loss One Day at a Time, at Home and at Work

After losing someone you care about, your life can feel like it is no longer your own. The best way to find the courage, perseverance, and desire to rebuild and redefine your new life is living with the loss, one day at a time. Emotional recovery is not accomplished by checking off items on a list but rather living the loss -- establishing a new relationship with your loved ones and the people around you, both at work and at home. This session will provide you with ideas and tools for how to interact with others, how to find passion and purpose, and how to rebuild your future.

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Celebrating Mental Health Month: A Call for Conversation and Action

As the flowers bloom and the world awakens in May, it's not just nature that's getting a fresh start. May is Mental Health Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness about mental health issues, breaking down stigmas, and supporting those on their journey to mental wellbeing. It's a month that shines a light on our inner world, encouraging conversations and actions that support mental health for all.

This month isn't just about recognizing the struggles; it's about celebrating the strides we've made in understanding, treating, and accepting mental health conditions. It's a time to share stories, spread knowledge, and empower individuals to seek help and support. From anxiety and depression to stress and psychosis, every aspect of mental health is acknowledged, creating an inclusive dialogue that uplifts and educates.

Empowerment Through Awareness

Education is at the heart of Mental Health Month. By learning more about mental health, we empower ourselves and others to recognize the signs of mental illness, seek help, and offer support. Workshops, seminars, and online resources proliferate, offering valuable information that demystifies mental health issues and promotes healthy coping strategies.

Community and Connection

Mental Health Month promotes a sense of community. Whether it's through local events, social media campaigns, or personal storytelling, the message is clear: You are not alone. Connecting with others, sharing experiences, and building networks of support are pivotal aspects of the month, reinforcing the idea that mental health is a collective responsibility.

Action and Advocacy

Finally, May is a time for action. It's an opportunity to advocate for policies that support mental health care, increase funding for mental health research, and ensure access to necessary services. It's about taking steps, both big and small, to create a world where mental health is prioritized and supported.

As Mental Health Month unfolds, let's all take a moment to reflect on our own mental health and the health of those around us. Engage in the conversation, learn something new, and perhaps, extend a hand to someone in need. Together, we can make mental health a priority, not just in May, but every day of the year.

Source: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/expert-answers/probiotics/faq-20058065>



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Osteoporosis Awareness

Women are four times more likely to develop Osteoporosis than men. According to the Mayo Clinic, several factors, including age, race, lifestyle choices, medical conditions, and treatments, can increase the likelihood of developing Osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis is more common in people who have too much or too little of certain hormones in their bodies. Long-term use of oral or injected corticosteroid medicines, such as prednisone and cortisone, interferes with the bone-rebuilding process. Certain lifestyle choices, such as a sedentary lifestyle, excessive alcohol consumption, and tobacco use, also increase one's risk of Osteoporosis.

According to Harvard Health, many nutrients play a role in bone health, such as calcium, vitamin D, protein, magnesium, phosphorous, and potassium. If you eat a healthy diet with lots of fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, and lean proteins, you should get enough nutrients to keep your bones healthy and functioning. Regular exercise reduces the rate of bone loss as women age and lowers the risk of fractures.

High and low-impact weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening exercises are the best defense against Osteoporosis. You might include jogging, walking, hiking, aerobics, or tennis. However, low-impact and weight-bearing exercise is good for those with osteoporosis, as it adds progressive loads when strength training benefits your bones. Work up to higher weights or resistance over time and exercise while standing to help with balance and fall prevention. Change your exercise routine every few months to incorporate different exercises for each muscle group, working the muscles at various angles and adding incremental loads.

As always, check with your doctor before starting any exercise program, and ideally, work with a certified fitness professional.

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Mindfulness Beyond Meditation: Finding Peace in the Everyday

Are you tired of being told to meditate? Maybe you've tried it and it's just not your thing. Well, I'm here to tell you that meditation isn't the only path to mindfulness – far from it! While it is certainly a valuable practice for some people, it's not a one-size-fits-all solution. The essence of mindfulness is about being fully present and engaged in the moment, aware of your thoughts and feelings without distraction or judgment. If traditional meditation isn't your cup of tea, fear not. There are myriad ways to cultivate mindfulness in your daily life, allowing you to reap its benefits of reduced stress, enhanced focus, and increased emotional regulation.

Mindful Eating:

Transform meals into a practice of mindfulness by fully engaging your senses. Savor the aroma, taste, and texture of your food. Eat slowly and without the distraction of screens or books, truly appreciating each bite. This not only improves digestion but also fosters a deeper connection to your eating experience.

Nature Walks:

Nature is a powerful ally in practicing mindfulness. Take a walk outside, observing everything around you. Notice the colors of the leaves, the patterns of the sky, and the feel of the ground beneath your feet. Listen to the symphony of sounds, from the rustling leaves to the chirping birds, immersing yourself in the natural world.

Mindful Listening:

Engage in conversations with the intent of truly listening rather than planning what to say next. Focus on the speaker's words, tone, and emotions. This not only improves your relationships but also helps you cultivate a habit of being present.

Gratitude Journaling:

End your day by writing down three things you're grateful for. Reflect on why these things matter. This practice shifts your focus to the positive and grounds you in the present moment.

Creative Activities:

Engage in activities that absorb your attention completely, whether it's painting, knitting, gardening, or playing an instrument. These acts require focus and present-mindedness, naturally leading to a state of mindfulness.

You see, mindfulness is about finding what works for you and integrating it into your daily routine. By exploring these practices, you can discover a more mindful, peaceful, and enriched life, all without traditional meditation. Embrace the journey of mindfulness, and watch as your world transforms, one moment at a time.

Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/rethinking-mental-health/202009/mindfulness-without-meditation>



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Sun-Dried Tomato & Feta Egg Bites

Ingredients

- 8 large eggs
- 1/3 cup whole milk
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 2/3 cup chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained
- 1/3 cup chopped scallions

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Coat a 12-cup muffin tin with cooking spray.
2. Whisk eggs, milk, oregano, garlic powder, pepper and salt together in a large bowl until well combined and frothy, Fold in feta, sun-dried tomatoes and scallions until combined.
3. Divide the mixture among the prepared muffin cups, about 1/3 cup each. Bake until puffed, set and golden, 16 to 18 minutes. (The egg bites will deflate once removed from the oven.) Let cool in the pan for 5 minutes before serving.

To Make Ahead:

Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days. Reheat in the microwave on High for 30 seconds. For a crisper texture, broil 8 inches from heat source until crispy and lightly golden brown, about 3 minutes.

Nutrition

Per Serving: 2 Egg Bites

Calories: 182 | Protein: 12g | Carbohydrates: 6g | Dietary Fiber: 1g | Saturated Fat: 5g | Sugar: 2g | Sodium: 402mg | Cholesterol: 266mg

Source: <https://www.eatingwell.com/sun-dried-tomato-feta-egg-bites-8404224>

Mental Health Awareness Month: Overcome Fear of Stigma to Seek Counseling

Personal challenges can impact well-being, and mental distractions that often accompany them can keep you from feeling like your best self. Your employee assistance program (EAP) is an easy path to help with challenges, but does stigma or embarrassment hold you back? You are sure of confidentiality, but you believe handling problems on your own better demonstrates you are not incompetent or weak. Here's the big reveal: Nothing could be further from the truth. Seeking counseling is a courageous and proactive decision that demonstrates strength, self-awareness, and a commitment to personal growth. Just as you would seek medical care for a physical ailment, seeking counseling for challenges or emotional pain is a vital aspect of self-care. Today, employers are committed to fostering a culture of support where seeking counseling is encouraged. So, go for it. Make the call. Your future self will thank you for it.

Get the Positivity Back in Your Team

Does your workplace team have a strong bond with a high level of trust? If not, getting the positivity back is probably easier than you think. Team morale will naturally erode if simple tasks that reinforce cohesiveness are ignored due to time pressures, deadlines, staff shortages, and overwork. This allows minor tensions and miscommunications to fester. So, create routine opportunities for facilitated discussions where the whole team can privately address conflicts, miscommunication, and perceived tensions to constructively resolve issues. Use this time to also clarify roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Dispel ambiguity and new potential sources of conflict. Now, witness how better you feel coming to work tomorrow.

Osteoporosis: Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Osteoporosis is a disease that weakens bones and contributes to fractures. It's a myth that only the elderly are affected, although they do experience increased risk. Young people are affected by conditions that impede bone health. For example, a young person suffering from bulimia may sustain a bone fracture due to adverse effects of the condition interfering with the absorption of calcium and essential nutrients. Hormonal disorders, diabetes, celiac disease, inflammatory bowel disease, and conditions like rheumatoid arthritis can play a role in weakening bones. Certain medications also weaken bones, especially if they affect calcium or vitamin D absorption. Brittle bones in osteoporosis are comparable to dried twigs that snap easily when bent or stepped on. This fragility has implications for everyday activities, as even minor stresses could fracture a bone. Work closely with your medical doctor, know your risk for osteoporosis, and follow their guidance. *Learn more:* www.columbiapsychiatry.org [search "ssri osteoporosis"]

Check Your Blood Pressure

Eleven million people in the U.S. have hypertension (high blood pressure) and don't know it. Are you one of them? Monitor your blood pressure if you haven't done so before or if it's been a while since your last check. High blood pressure is often called the "silent killer" because it has virtually no noticeable symptoms until its effects suddenly create a hypertensive crisis, which could be a heart attack or stroke. Contrary to popular belief, experiencing a headache does not necessarily indicate high blood pressure! Scary fact: One-third of stroke victims experience vision loss—some permanently and in both eyes. *Source:* millionhearts.hhs.gov [search "hypertension"]

Avoid Workplace Communication Landmines

Many organizations view communication problems as their biggest and costliest challenge. Virtually nothing happens without communication, so this leaves a lot of room for trouble. Regarding impact on staff, employee conflicts, hard feelings, resentments, and even a desire to leave the employer entirely are consequences associated with problematic communication. How many of the following communication landmines do you recognize? 1) Misreading the tone of text (misinterpreting a received message creates unnecessary tension); 2) lack of clarity or information when given an assignment (leads to confusion, frustration, and delay or possibly fear of asking for further clarification); 3) failure to validate (not giving the speaker verbal and nonverbal cues that confirm the message is being received and understood, causing frustration and tension); 4) withholding information (deliberately withholding information or excluding coworkers from important discussions leads to feelings of exclusion and resentment); and 5) ignoring nonverbal cues such as facial expressions or other body language during a conversation meant to convey feeling and meaning (the person speaking feels the listener is disinterested or lacks empathy, creating tension). If there is one overarching strategy for preventing or overcoming communication challenges, it is promoting a workplace culture that fosters respect. This positive workplace lays the groundwork for better communication by promoting trust, collaboration, and mutual understanding among employees. Respectful workplaces solve conflicts faster and with fewer of them because employees are more willing to speak up, dialogue about issues, and find solutions. This also shortens the life of conflicts and helps avoid damage to relationships.

How to Fix Your Day

Experiencing a negative event can disrupt your day, causing your previously uplifted mood to seemingly vanish. Take these actions to restore your positive mindset: 1) Admit things have been thrown out of whack and your feelings are normal. 2) Attempt a short "geographic" change (like a walk outside to change visuals away from the scene of the event). 3) Identify negative thoughts reverberating from the event. 4) Challenge the negative thoughts to disrupt their effects. 5) Identify positive thoughts to make #4 a speedier step. 6) Focus on what you can control—reaction, perspective, prevention, improvements, boundaries, self-care, etc. This gives you a constructive outlet to match your need to respond. 7) Plan a good thing or two—events, experiences, and treats—to rebalance the day. 8) Need support? Reach out to that friend to vent. 9) Find the lesson. Discover or consider what positive outcome exists indirectly or directly because of the event?) 10) Celebrate that you fixed your day!

Mental Decluttering—a Different Kind of Spring Cleaning

Mental clutter is overpowering stress created by the daily demands of modern life, our multiple roles, to-do lists, thoughts, emotions, responsibilities, and the constant influx of information. Enter the self-help concept of decluttering to reduce stress, improve concentration, enhance creativity, and cultivate a greater sense of well-being. Mental decluttering is about creating space for what truly matters and letting go of what no longer serves us mentally and emotionally. Signs indicating the need for mental decluttering include difficulty concentrating, experiencing a lack of creativity, and feeling disconnected from a positive sense of well-being. The practice of mental decluttering may involve various techniques, such as mindfulness meditation, journaling, prioritizing tasks, setting boundaries, and letting go of negative thoughts or emotions. *New resource: "Declutter Your Mind and Stop Overthinking: 87 Tools & Techniques to Calm Your Mind & Improve Your Wellbeing (2023)"*

Stay Safe on a Bicycle

Each year, about 1,000 deaths occur from bike accidents, and most happen because traffic rules weren't followed. Spring begins a surge in bicycle riding, so it's smart to consider tips you may not have heard of before to help you stay safe. Here's one regarding lighting: Safety is maximized during night riding when lights can be seen from both ends of your bicycle. Have one blinking to attract attention and a separate one that is steady on. This allows other road users to gauge your distance. In addition to proper lighting, wearing reflective clothing and using hand signals are also crucial for safe biking. Remember, staying visible and predictable on the road can significantly reduce the risk of accidents, ensuring a pleasant and secure ride for everyone. *Source: www.nhtsa.gov [search "bicycle safety rules"]*

We know it is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach. Your EAP is here to help with family, work, health, & legal issues.

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