



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Grief and Loss

Loss can happen at any age, but it is more common as people get older. Common losses for older adults are the deaths of loved ones, loss of a job and income, loss of health, and loss of independence. Sometimes, many losses happen in a short time. This can make it harder to cope with each loss.

Grief is the emotional response for loss. Everyone grieves differently. It is thought that there are five common emotions for grief. These are described in the table below. Some people may have one or two of these. Some may have all five. These emotions do not happen in any order.

Emotion	How a person reacts	What a person thinks
Denial and Isolation	Will not accept the loss. Stays away from social activities and people.	“This can’t be happening.”
Anger	Thinks the loss is not fair. Can feel angry about everything.	“Why me?” “Who is to blame?”
Bargaining	Asks a higher power to change what has happened.	“If you stop this from happening, I will...”
Depression	May be sad all the time. May not be able to do normal daily activities.	“What is the point of doing anything?”
Acceptance	Finds peace with what has happened. Accepts the loss.	“I still feel sad, but it will be okay.”

Grief may include physical symptoms. Some common symptoms are:

- Physical pain, such as headaches or an upset stomach
- Low energy, and not being able to sleep
- Less interest in eating
- Being distracted or forgetful
- Having a hard time concentrating
- Changes in the person’s spirituality

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

Tips for Helping Older Adults With Grief and Loss

Below are some tips to help older adults cope with grief.

- **Help them stay connected to friends and family.** Spend time with the person. Offer to invite others to visit, such as members of the person's faith community. Suggest joining a support group. Suggest volunteering for a cause they choose.
- **Be available to listen when they are ready.** Let them talk openly about their feelings. Do not give advice. Listen without judgement. Do not compare their experience to what others have experienced. Do not compare their feelings with how others feel.
- **Suggest they write about their emotions.** Sometimes writing down thoughts and feelings can make them less powerful.
- **Join them in healthy activities they enjoy.** Travel, play a game, take a walk, or cook a healthy meal with them.
- **Encourage them to start a new activity or hobby.** Perhaps they want to learn to draw, or play an instrument. Look for free or low-cost classes at nearby senior centers or community recreation centers.
- **Help the person with daily chores,** such as grocery shopping and cleaning.
- **Schedule daily exercise.** Join them for a walk or a swim. Try a fitness class together.
- **If the grief is caused by the death of a loved one, honor the deceased person.** Ask if they want to celebrate the person's birthday, enjoy their favorite foods, or make a memory book.

Grieving takes time. There is no set length of how long grief lasts. But some people are not able to recover from grief. Watch for signs of depression or anxiety, such as when the person stops taking care of them self, or talks a lot about death. If the person shows signs of depression or anxiety that gets worse over time, ask a health care provider or mental health professional for help. If the loss is a death, local hospice services host support groups to help family members with the grieving process. Over time, most people will start to feel better.

Useful Resources

Area Agencies on Aging have a complete list of local grief and loss support groups. Use the Eldercare Locator for find the local agency: www.eldercare.acl.gov or 1-800-677-1116.

Written By: Lillian Mees, LMSW and Charisse Radnothy, LMSW, Banner University Medical Center
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Edited by an interprofessional team from the University of Arizona Center on Aging