

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Signs of Grief

Though each person grieves in unique ways, there are common behavioral, emotional, and physical signs and symptoms that people who are grieving typically experience.

Physically, persons affected by grief may experience:

- Fatigue and exhaustion alternating with periods of high alertness and energy
- Temporary hearing loss or vision impairment (possibly associated with dissociation)
- Difficulty sleeping
- Disturbed appetite (either more appetite or less appetite than normal)
- Muscle tremors
- Chills and/or sweating
- Difficulty breathing or rapid respiration
- Increased heart rate or blood pressure
- Stomach and/or intestinal problems
- Nausea and/or dizziness
- Mentally, persons affected by grief may experience:
- Confusion (memory, concentration, judgment and comprehension difficulties)
- Intrusion (unwanted thoughts, arousal, nightmares)
- Dissociation (feeling of detachment and unreality, disorientation, denial)
- Emotionally, persons affected by grief may experience:
- Shock
- Fear, anxiety or apprehension
- Anger, irritability or agitation
- Guilt
- Numbness, remoteness, depression

There are many ways that people can choose to cope with grief and loss in their lives, some constructive and some destructive. Among the more destructive coping methods are people's choice to turn to alcohol or other drugs to dull their pain and/or provide a illusory means of escape from the pressing demands of grieving. Heavy use of either drugs or alcohol may actually extend and prolong the grief period and lead to other serious problems such as substance abuse or dependence (otherwise known as addiction). Additionally, alcohol, and several other drugs and medicines including the benzodiazepines (like Valium, Atavan, Xanax and Klonapin), and the barbiturates have a depressant effect on the brain that can actually lead a person towards serious depression when misused. Magnified feelings of hopelessness and even suicidal thoughts may occur in such circumstances when they otherwise would not. Mixing alcohol with these depressant drugs can be fatal. For these reasons, if alcohol and drugs are to be used at all during a time of grief, their use should be limited, or they should be used as directed by a physician.

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