


A man with dark, curly hair is shown in profile, looking out of a large window. He is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. The window looks out onto a lush green forest. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Grieving during the holidays

Dealing with your feelings (without guilt or comparisons)



Unfortunately for people everywhere, loss is both universal and limitless. And it often hits us the hardest around holidays and celebrations.

The experience of loss is unique to every individual, but our feelings around the experience of loss share a common label: **grief**.

And while we've all been told grief serves a purpose—as an important part of **the healing process**—grief's “functionality” doesn't make it easier to get through, especially when we're worried about whether or not we “should” be sad. And the holiday season can make all of our feelings around this process feel bigger and less manageable, especially as we try to put on a “happy face” for others.

Depending on what kind of loss we're grieving, we may feel like we should keep it to ourselves because others have it worse. But mourning the end of a relationship, being heartbroken about the loss of a pet or feeling deeply sad about job not working out is not self-indulgent.

Comparing your experiences and feelings to what other people are going through won't help you heal.

Death is not the only loss that matters. Grief is a natural, human reaction to all manner of loss, such as:

- Ending a relationship¹
- Losing a furry (or scaly or feathery) companion²
- Missing out on a milestone event or holiday³
- Getting fired or made redundant
- Losing your home
- Permanent injuries
- A new health diagnosis (your own or that of a loved one)

These are just a few of many, many examples, and it makes sense: Loss is as diverse as the people who go through it.

And there's no one-size-fits-all solution that works for everyone. But if one thing is true for everyone, it's that adapting after loss takes time and effort.

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-mysteries-love/201709/grieving-the-end-relationship>

² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/animal-attachment/201702/7-self-care-essentials-while-grieving-the-death-pet>

³ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/raising-parents/202003/grieving-missing-graduations-and-proms>

Adapting to your new normal after loss

After a loss, one of the hardest things to achieve is getting to a place where we accept our feelings and adjust to our new "normal". Here are a few first steps to take.

1. LET THE FEELINGS COME

When feelings of sadness, anger or fear come up about something that has happened, let them come. Try not to block them, judge or compare.

According to David Kessler,⁴ author of *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief*,⁵ it's essential to feel these feelings for a few minutes at minimum, without rushing to move on or blocking them outright.

Let your feelings move through you, instead of stuffing them down and getting stuck. Whether you like them or not, feelings aren't good or bad; they just are.

Remember, your feelings don't have to measure up to your (or any one else's) expectations. Your life and experiences are your own—it makes sense that your reaction to loss is, too.

2. OWN YOUR EMOTIONS.

This is about acknowledging your thoughts and feelings to yourself. A simple way to do this is to tell yourself how you're feeling and why. For example, you could say: I'm sad because I'm not going to have a partner this holiday season, or I'm angry because my health issues mean I won't be able to attend large holiday gatherings.

Author of *Understanding Your Grief*, Dr. Alan Wolfelt maintains that it's key we claim our experiences and our responses to them to avoid feeling like victims.⁶

It's important to take ownership of feelings and thoughts. After all, they come from our minds and bodies and denying their existence will only make things worse.



⁴ <https://grief.com/sixth-stage-of-grief/>

⁵ <https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>

⁶ <https://www.centerforloss.com/grief/im-seeking-help/>

3. MOVE YOUR FOCUS

After you've given yourself some time to be present with and feel your feelings, it may be helpful to move your attention back to the present moment.

One way to do this is by focusing on your breath⁹ with a round of deep breathing. 4-7-8 breathing is an easy technique to get you started (for guided instructions, use a mental wellbeing app like Koa Care 360). Another option is to mentally list objects in the room with you in a "taking stock" activity.

Moving your focus to elements of real life you can perceive, i.e., the feel of your fuzzy sweater between your fingers (soft and warm) or the scent of hot chocolate wafting from the mug in front of you is another option.

Whatever your feelings are, know that grief is a normal reaction to many life experiences.

But sometimes you just need to have a long talk with a real, live person. If that's where you're at right now, you can get help in the U.S. by dialing 988 or by calling SAMHSA's national helpline (available in English and Spanish) to direct you to further help available in your location. For those in the U.K., here are lists of Mental Health helplines from the NHS.

At Koa Health, we're taking a prevention-first approach to mental health, helping your employees understand their current needs so they can access the right support at the right time in the right way.

Contact us at **info@koahealth.com**, or schedule a call with one of our experts **[here](#)**.

⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2017/11/08/7-ways-to-pull-your-wandering-mind-back-into-the-present-moment/#58f3e6a13314>