

When Someone You Love Dies:

A resource for self-advocates

We all grieve in our own way. All responses are valid, even if they are different than others or what might be expected. When someone you love dies, you might have many different feelings, sensations, or emotions. They don't always make sense, and they can make you feel very unsettled.

Feelings You Might Experience

- Anger, frustration, out of control, worry, and/or stuck.
- Restlessness, anxiety, or like you cannot relax.
- Difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep.
- Changes in your appetite and eating (e.g., feel less hungry or hungrier).
- Stomach aches, headaches, or other body discomfort.
- Trouble concentrating and trying to organize, plan, and complete tasks.
- Trouble doing things you used to do. Like not having the energy, confidence, or desire.
- Needing help doing things you might not have needed help with before.
- Trouble identifying and naming your emotions.
- Feeling very sad and feeling like crying.
- Feeling nothing or feelings of grief that comes later.
- Feeling a sense of relief or joy on behalf of the person who has died.

Things You Can Do to Help

- Take care of yourself: Try to get enough sleep, eat well, drink water, and exercise in any way.
- Make art: Create a photo book, collage, or drawing to remember a loved one.
- Learn about death: Read about or talk to someone to help you understand the concept of death in a concrete way.
- Seek counseling if your emotions are causing you to feel depressed, overwhelmed, or shut down.
- Try not to criticize or judge yourself if you can't do all the things!



When you are experiencing grief, your brain, nervous system, and sensory system can become dysregulated, and you might have more pronounced responses. For example:

Sensory Dysregulation

- Having sensory differences or sensory overload (e.g., lights, visions, sounds, smells, clothing textures, feeling hot or cold).
- Feeling overwhelmed or out of control.
- Having meltdowns or aggressive behavior.
- Experiencing a feeling of excitement.
- Laughing
- Experiencing shutdowns or being unable to express your emotions, needs, and desires.
- Having a delayed or extreme emotional response.
- Hyperfocusing on and becoming anxious about what to do in social situations, such as hospital visits and funerals.

Things You Can Do to Help

- Use calming and coping strategies or routines, such as deep breathing, listening to music, going for a walk, or doing ANYTHING you have used successfully in the past to calm your nervous system.
- Find a trusted person that you can talk to about the situation.
- Ask about the rituals and routines that you can be a part of.
- Look at the funeral home website to see pictures of where the funeral will take place.

