



# BalanceWorks® Newsletter

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## When a Family Grieves

Families weather many hardships together, from flu seasons to job losses. But when a loved one dies, it tests family bonds as nothing else can. Whether it's the loss of a grandparent, a spouse or even the family dog, grief can hit hard and last longer than anyone expects. After a loss, family members often deal with their grief in different ways. Grief can draw families closer together. Sometimes, it can pull them apart.

No one can adequately prepare you to handle your grief -- let alone a spouse's or a child's grief. Learning about grief and how it affects your family can help you get through the difficult times together. It may even help your family grow stronger.

### A world upside down

"When you're grieving, you're in a state of chaos," says Tom Golden, L.C.S.W., psychotherapist. Grief throws your life into turmoil. It disrupts routines. Deeply held beliefs can become flimsy in the face of loss. You can't predict how you'll respond when someone you love dies. Reactions to loss depend on many factors. How did the person die? What kind of relationship did you have with the person? Have you had other losses? How did you deal with them?

It's important to realize that each family member will express grief in his or her own way. "There are as many ways to grieve as there are people," Mr. Golden says. In his practice, Mr. Golden has observed different tendencies in the ways men and women grieve. Women tend to feel more comfortable talking openly about their emotions. Often, women cry more easily than men do. Men, he says, tend to take an active approach to handling their grief. They may, for example, plant a tree or organize an event in honor of the person who has died. But these are only tendencies. Most people draw from both types of behavior. It's important to remember that there is no right way to grieve. Knowing that your parent, child or spouse deals with grief differently than you do can help you understand and support one another during this difficult time.



For more information or support about family grief, contact the work/life experts at **BalanceWorks®** by calling:

**1.800.327.2255**

**eni's BalanceWorks®** program is a confidential 24/7 service provided by your employer to help achieve work/life balance.



## Through a child's eyes

As a parent, your first reaction to a death in the family may be to protect your child from the pain of loss. Be careful that your protective instincts don't make it more difficult for your child to grieve. Like adults, children experience chaos and loneliness when someone they love dies. They need to know that they aren't alone in what they are feeling. You are your child's role model for how to grieve. Sharing some of your own sorrow can help your child feel less isolated. "Seeing adults grieve can help children figure out how they're feeling inside," Mr. Golden says. Your child might be able to find the words to express his or her own thoughts by hearing you talk about your sadness or anger.

Children also need to understand what it means for someone to die. It's not enough to teach your children that 'Grandma's gone to heaven' if they don't connect that with the actual death of their grandmother, and what has happened. This is a good time to discuss your family's spiritual beliefs. Explain, without giving too many unnecessary details, what happens to the body after death; that her body doesn't work anymore, she doesn't see, breathe, or feel anything now. Never tell your child that their loved one has simply 'gone to sleep', because a child may start to believe that they can also die by going to sleep.

Parents should also reassure children that they will be OK. Children often fear for their own safety after a loved one dies. They may also fear that their parents may die. Remind children of all the people who love them and who are there to take care of them.

## On the path toward healing

Family members resolve their grief at different times and in different ways. The grieving process does not fit into a timetable. Healing from a loss can take a long time. Experts say that it may take years to adjust to the loss of a spouse. Children who lose a parent may process grief in spurts over a period of years.

Soon after a loved one dies, you might feel OK for only a few hours at a time. Eventually you'll have good days, then weeks. Over time, you'll find yourself looking to the future with hope. Once you have accepted the loss, it doesn't mean you've forgotten that person. This is an important point to stress to children. Remembering this can help them -- and you -- move forward with life.

## Dealing with loss

These suggestions can help you and your family deal with grief:

- Talk about the person who died. Use his or her name.
- Tell stories and express what the person meant to you.
- Try to wait at least one year before making major decisions.
- Make new friends, and spend time with old ones. When you feel ready, start to do things that will help you look forward to the future.
- Accept changes in family traditions. When a family member dies, family roles are likely to change. It may help to develop new traditions to suit your new family structure.

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