

How long does grief last?

Dr. Karen S. Scott



Because of the overwhelming, intense pain that comes with loss, many desperately ask, “How long does grief last?” Unfortunately, there is no specific answer to this question because each person’s grief is individual. How long your grief lasts depends on things such as what your relationship was with the deceased, what coping strategies you have, how good your support system is, etc. “Time heals all wounds” is a common saying, but not exactly accurate. The acute pain lessens over time, but the pain never completely leaves you, because your love for the deceased will always be with you. Despite the many individual differences in grief, below are general guidelines about the duration of grief.

- Your grief will last as long as it lasts, and that timeframe will be longer than you had hoped.
- As a result of the magnitude of the loss you are experiencing, you may feel very different and not like your usual self. This is normal.
- You will most likely experience many emotional ups and downs, as you struggle to understand and cope with your emotions. This is one of many ways in which grief is very dis-regulating.
- You may feel exhausted, because grief is emotionally and physically exhausting. Allow yourself plenty of time to rest. Your body needs rest.
- The first year is usually the most difficult, with an entire year of “firsts”: first birthday, first Christmas, etc., without your loved one. Sometimes the anticipation of these days is harder than the actual day. Making a plan for what you are going to do on these days will help you avoid being caught off-guard.
- The second year is not necessarily easier but is different. In this year you begin to fully grasp the finality of the loss and start to make adjustments to incorporate the loss into your life.
- Your grief may be compounded by a lack of understanding from friends who don’t comprehend how long grief takes or may offer meaningless platitudes. Simply move on; don’t waste time being angry; you know in your heart they simply can’t understand. Getting into emotional battles with people like this can prolong your grief and rob you of precious energy.
- Grief cannot be rushed, but participating in a support group, attending counseling, or accessing the support of someone who has experienced grief and demonstrated a healthy outcome can assist you in moving forward with your journey.
- The most important guideline is to understand that you get to choose how you get through this journey of grief. You can choose to work through the pain and move forward to a day when you can feel hope for the future and you can experience happiness.

Lost & Found Grief Center ©2020