

Identifying Your Feelings

Check any of the emotional states that best describe how you are generally feeling at this point in your bereavement:

Afraid: You're scared of what life will be like now. You may be fearful about your ability to cope emotionally, or you may be uncertain about practical concerns like money, raising the children, or where you'll live. You may just feel afraid, without really knowing why.

Angry: Anger often feels like a physical thing. Your muscles tense up, and you may feel like yelling at someone or hitting something. Your rage may be aimed at yourself or you lost loved one, or you may find yourself getting angry at other people, society, or your spiritual beliefs.

Anxious: Anxiety is distinct from fear, and is often a generalized feeling. If you're afraid, at least you know what scares you. If you're anxious, on the other hand, you're likely to feel agitated without knowing exactly why. You may experience cold sweats, hyperactivity, or edginess.

Ashamed: You may feel that you should be getting over your feelings, or you may be ashamed to show them in front of family, friends, and others. You may also harbor feelings about the death, or the fact that you're still alive, that feel shameful to you and are difficult to share with others.

Bitter: Life may feel very unjust, and you may feel cheated and disappointed. You may feel jealous and resentful toward others who still have what has been taken from you, and you may feel victimized by fate.

Confused: You may be unsure of what you're feeling, or your feelings may change quickly. Your thoughts may be unfocused, and it may be difficult to concentrate; or you may have a hard time knowing what to do and how best to make decisions.

Depressed: Depression can be a general mood of melancholy, or a full blown experience that is all-encompassing and seems to have no end. In a major depression your mood, appetite, sleep, memory, and ability to concentrate are seriously impaired. You may feel the impulse to do self-destructive things in an effort to find relief.

Despairing: Here you feel a sense of futility. It seems as though things will never get better, and the distress caused by the death may feel unbearable. Although you want to, you may not be able to get the feelings out by crying, or you may be unable to stop crying.

Detached: You may feel disconnected from the death and detached from life in general. The experience seems unreal, as it is happening to someone else. You simply pass through life each day, your actions detached from your thoughts and feelings.

Guilty: You may feel that you could have done more to help your loved or to prevent the death. You may feel intense regret about the way you behaved toward your loved one, or mixed feelings about the death itself. It is also common for the bereaved to feel guilty when they begin to laugh and find pleasure in life once again, or begin new relationships. Or you may experience survival guilt—a sense of remorse that you remain alive while you loved one has died.