

Expectations in Grief

It is natural for many people to place certain expectations on what the experience of loss should be or what grief should look like. There may be a sense of relief that comes from predicting what is next or when the painful emotions will subside; however, most of us are unprepared for what the grieving process holds. Whether we are placing unrealistic expectations on ourselves or experiencing them from others, this invalidates the complex emotions we experience after loss and leads to a more challenging healing journey.

The Expectations We Place on Ourselves

To measure progress in our healing, we may endlessly research what is “normal” in our experience of loss. In doing this, we are placing unrealistic expectations on how we grieve. This can lead to more harm than good as we transition into the world without our loved ones. Unrealistic expectations may increase negative moods, cause us to feel as though we must “get over” our grief, generalize our grief experience, and result in many other deterrents to our healing process. It is important to allow yourself the space necessary to explore the reasons behind these unrealistic expectations. Seeking the help of a mental health professional can provide you with some guidance during this time.

The Expectations Others Place on Us

At times, the expectations placed on us during a loss come from those around us. These expectations can be obvious such as being expected to return to the same level of work with little consideration from employers. Even those family and friends closest to us may place pressure on us to “move on” and respond inappropriately towards our experience of loss. These types of interactions, inadvertently or not, can intensify grief emotions and lead us to question our experiences during this process. Identifying your needs and surrounding yourself with people that understand you can help in mitigating these situations.

Managing the Expectations of Loss

Understanding that grief is an individualized process that comes with surprising responses from ourselves and others helps to avoid the expectation trap. Tips to help embrace self-compassion and promote more realistic expectations of our grief are:

- Remember, there is no timeline to grieve. No matter how long ago the loss, it is normal to have feelings of grief when thinking of our loved ones
- Grief may come with a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and reactions



- Loss can bring about changes in all areas of our lives
- Other peoples' experiences of their loss may differ from ours, there is no right or wrong way to grieve

Our experience of loss is just as unique as our fingerprints; each person's grief is unique to each loved one they grieve. The loss of a loved one is challenging and it is important to manage our expectations of what comes next.

For additional resources, visit our website at www.childbereavement.org. To register for our free, virtual grief support groups, give us a call at (888) 988-5438 or e-mail support@childbereavement.org.



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