

Would a Grief Support Group Help Me?

Objective

To help people who have experienced a loss evaluate whether a support group would be helpful.

You Should Know

Losing a person close to you is always difficult. Grief support groups can help, but some people are reluctant to share their feelings with strangers or simply do not have the emotional energy to reach out to a group when they are already so stressed.

Would a grief support work be helpful to you? This worksheet will help you make that decision and will provide contact information for various support groups.

Who goes to support groups? People of all ages and backgrounds attend grief support groups for all types of loss (parental, child, spouse, sibling, etc.), at any stage of grief—whether newly bereaved or having had the loss many years earlier.

What kind of groups are there? There is a wide variety of formats and approaches, including:

- Peer-led or professionally-led.
- In-person or online.
- Online formats differ too:
 - Discussion forums: you can just read the posts or you can share your story and support others. Some are moderated and others are not.
 - Video conferencing: in real time or watching the recording.
 - Email and social media.
- Free or fee-based.
- For general or specific types of grief (parental, child, spouse, sibling).
- For specific groups (religious, by age, etc.).
- Consistent membership or constantly-changing attendance.

How do I know if a group will help me? You do not know for sure, but tens of thousands of people have found them useful in the grieving process. You may benefit from a support group support because:

- You would like to talk about your experience without needing to take care of the person listening to you—a common experience when the person who died was important to both of you.
- You would like to hear about other people's experiences and see how they relate to yours.
- You are lonely and you would like to feel others' support and offer yours to them.

Grief support groups might be particularly helpful if you have any of the following behaviors:

- You cannot stop thinking about your loss.
- Your grief interferes with your job, your family obligations, or your self-care.
- You cannot seem to get over your sadness and depression.
- You have ongoing symptoms like social withdrawal, crying, sleep disturbance, eating too little or too much, increased irritability and anger, or panic attacks.
- You are abusing substances or engaging in addictive behaviors.
- Someone close to you is worried about you, or you are worried about yourself.

Why would I go? Everyone needs support. Family or close friends can be great, but they may be dealing with the loss themselves, or may not be good at listening. Sometimes people feel freer to express themselves with strangers. In a support group you can expect to experience:

- Reassurance that your experiences are normal.
- Feelings of connection and belonging.
- Increased ability to cope with life.
- Useful information and resources.
- Kindness and empathy.
- Gratification in giving support to others.

What if I do not like the group?

- You should never feel pressured to share.
- You can leave at any point you do not feel comfortable.
- Sometimes it takes trying a few groups before you find one that is a good fit.
- Support groups may not be for you. That is fine—and it is great to give it a try to find out.

How do I find a group? Finding a group is much like finding any kind of service. You can ask for recommendations from people you know (friends, clergy, mental health practitioners, funeral home professionals, etc.) and/or search online.

There are many different kinds of groups. Here are some resources.

- [The 7 Best Online Grief Support Groups of 2021](#). Whether they are the “best” or not, it is a very detailed list of support groups with a sampling of what you can find online.
- If the person you lost was under hospice care, many hospice organizations welcome you to their free services. Find information at www.hospiceandcommunitycare.org
- This resource can help if you have lost a child or sibling. [The Compassionate Friends](#) was founded over 50 years ago. It offers local chapters, online support, and lots of resources.
- If you have lost someone to cancer, [CancerCare](#) provides a variety of live and online groups for specific groups of people who have lost people to cancer, including parents/single parents, spouses/partners, young adults, caregivers, and more.
- If you have lost a spouse these resources can help: <https://soaringspirits.org/>, <https://widowsconnection.org/>, <https://nationalwidowers.org/>
- If you have lost someone to addiction, you can get help at [Grief Recovery After Substance Passing](#).

No matter what your circumstances and wishes are, there is likely a group for you. Find more by searching the internet for “grief support groups for the death of a _____.”

What to Do

What are some reasons you might consider finding a grief support group?

What action steps can you take to find a grief support group?

Have you decided to give it a try? _____

If so, when will you take those action steps? _____

If you decide to try a support group, write about your experience below after you have tried the group (or groups) for a month or more.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
