



# life Happens

## HEADLINES

DECEMBER 2020 | Employee Edition

## Giving Yourself Grace During a Season of Grief

As December rings in the holiday season, traditionally a time of togetherness with family and friends, many of us are grappling with loss and grief stemming from a year of unimaginable change. We have collectively experienced radical shifts in our daily routines, uprooting our sense of normalcy and stability. With lost traditions, lost income and, for some, the profound loss of a loved one, our holiday celebrations may feel more melancholy than merry. Acknowledging grief and creating a plan to cope can help counterbalance difficult emotions and provide a sense of comfort through troubling times.

### Understanding Grief

Grief is a human response to a painful event. Despite being universal, it is experienced differently by each person, which can make it feel isolating. Grief is a complex process, and feelings of guilt, relief, anger, denial, sadness, and numbness are common and can occur in a cycle or at the same time. Grieving takes a toll physically as well as psychologically. Throughout the grieving process, the body releases a flood of stress hormones leading to symptoms such as changes in appetite, difficulty sleeping, loss of energy or concentration, body aches, and digestive issues. Whether you are grieving a change in how you work, the inability to gather normally, missed milestones like weddings or graduations, or the loss of a loved one, know that every grief is valid and has a real effect emotionally, physically, and mentally.



## Coping with Grief

Grief looks different for everyone, and while there's no set timeline for the process of grief, there are ways to make it more manageable.

**Allow yourself to feel whatever you feel .** Grief brings up a complex cocktail of emotions, so take time to recognize these feelings as they arise rather than pushing them aside. Whether you find joy or sadness during the holidays accept these emotions as valid- offer yourself compassion and remember there is no wrong way to feel.

**Create space to remember.** Memory can be a helpful tool when coping with loss. Remember the good times and the impact they had on your life. Share memories with your family or friends, write a letter, look through old pictures, or create artwork. If you're coping with the loss of a loved one, find ways to remind yourself of their presence rather than their absence. This could look like lighting a special candle at the table or making their favorite holiday meal.

**Pick your battles.** Grief can be an isolating experience, so it's important to stay connected to your support systems. Choose which events you are comfortable handling and avoid canceling all your plans. If you find yourself feeling stressed or overwhelmed with holiday responsibilities, communicate this, and let others help.

**Take care of your body.** Grief is as physical as it is emotional and mental. The stress hormones released during grief can lower your immune functions and leave you vulnerable to illness. Take care of your body by avoiding excessive alcohol consumption as this can intensify difficult emotions, maintaining a regular sleep schedule, drinking plenty of water, and participating in moderate exercise each day.

For more tips on managing difficult feelings due to loss or grief, click [here](#).

## Grief & Depression

Symptoms of grief are often mistaken for depression, but while grief subsides over time, untreated depression can worsen. In an article by *Psychiatric Times*, one month after experiencing a loss, **40%** of griever's meet the criteria for major depression. After two months, **24%** of griever's meet the criteria for major depression. For this reason, it is difficult to diagnose depression within the first few months of experiencing loss and grief.



Source: [The Recovery Village](#)

## Risk of Mental Illness

For most, grieving takes a significant toll on mental health. Emotions like hopelessness, sadness, and loneliness overlap and it can be hard to distinguish between grief and mental illness. Sometimes chronic grief can develop into a mental disorder, with depression being the most common disorder experienced.

The mental health affects of grief can cause people to turn to alcohol, self-harm, drugs, and other unhealthy coping mechanisms, increasing their risk of addiction and mental health disorders. Overwhelming grief that increases over time and interferes with day to day life is called complicated grief. Complicated grief effects between 10-20% of grieving adults. While complicated grief isn't recognized as a mental health disorder, it is a serious condition.



## Put Your EAP to Work

As your Employee Assistance Program providers, our job at EFR is to help and guide you and your family members through difficult life phases. If you, your child, or other family member is experiencing difficulties coping with grief, please give us a call at **800-327-4692**. To learn more about your EAP, visit [efr.org](http://efr.org).

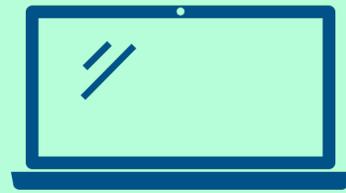


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