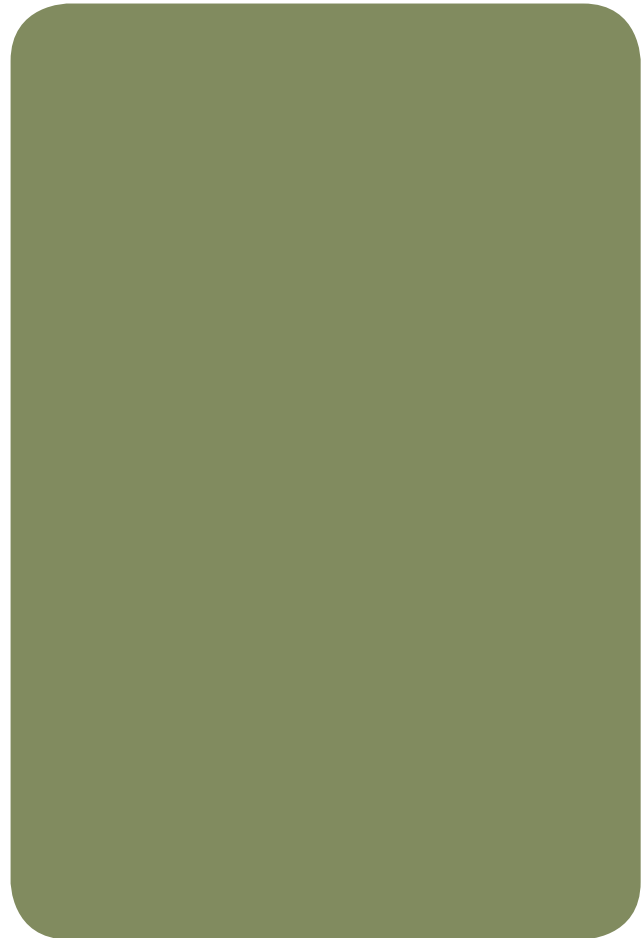


# DON'T BE SURPRISED WHEN...

## TIPS FOR YOUNG ADULTS GRIEVING A DEATH



The N e ter  
se ren ies



## There's no syllabus, how-to manual, or timeline for grief.

One of the most shocking aspects can be the reality that there's no expected course or definable endpoint for grief. It's as individual and unique as the relationship you had with the person who died. You may find yourself struggling with the thought, "How can I still be grieving when it's been (x # of days, months, years)?" Sometimes it will be your own protest, coming from a wish to feel differently than you do. Other times this expectation will come from others, "Aren't you over it by now? It's been..." Grief isn't something you have to finish or move past.

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## You don't recognize yourself

Grief can change everything, including how you feel, think, act, and what you value. For some this can be a clarifying process, bringing priorities into clear focus.

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## Some people are there for you and others fade away

Grief has a way of bringing relationships into the spotlight. Sometimes the people who can and can't show up to support you might be surprising.

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You might find yourself deepening friendships with some people and setting clear boundaries with others. Because grief can be pretty isolating and lonely, it's helpful to find people who feel safe, accepting, and supportive. If friends and family aren't able to be there for you, look for a support group in your community or [online](https://doug.org/grief-support-programs) at [doug.org/grief-support-programs](https://doug.org/grief-support-programs).

## You grieve more than just the person

You might grieve the person you were before the death or the way your life used to be. You might also grieve how the death is changing relationships with friends, family, and partners. Many people miss being able to predict how they will respond to certain situations such as work, meet ups with a friend, or holidays. You may grieve events in the future that will be different without the person: graduations, wedding, having children, buying a house, career achievements, etc.



Remind yourself that grieving these other aspects is as valid and normal as grieving the person and who they were in your life.

## Guilt and regret show up

We'd venture a guess that 99.9% of people grieving feel guilt or regret about something they did and said or didn't do or say. We aren't perfect in our relationships because we are human and we all say and do things that looking back we wish we hadn't. When someone dies, this very natural experience can feel extra intense because we can't go back and change things.



It can help to acknowledge these feelings, without rushing to push them aside. Sometimes just sitting with guilt and regret can lessen their intensity. You can also try one of the suggestions in the 8 Self-Care Tips as a way to transform these emotions. If verbalizing these feelings of guilt and regret helps, reach out to a friend, family member, colleague, therapist or other trusted person who will listen without a dismissive "don't feel that way" or "you know that's not right" comment.

## You need a lot of self-care

And we don't just mean hot baths, although those are great too. What you did for self-care in the past may or may not work as well when you're grieving. Be open to new ways of sustaining and nourishing your body, mind, and being. "



Try to find out what the movie is about before going to be prepared for any unexpected grief story lines!

**1. Breathe.** When we get tense we tend to hold our breath or have short, shallow breaths. First, just notice that you are breathing and then try slowing it down, breathing more into your belly, and exhaling a little longer than you inhale.

**2. Move your body.** This doesn't have to be a sport (but it can be) — take a walk, do a push up, dance, or try cleaning (strange, but it can help).

**3. Express yourself.** Write, draw, organize, listen to/play music, or anything else that lets you express yourself without having to talk to someone.

**4. Make room for whatever feelings are coming up.** If you try to push them away, they'll likely push back harder. Feelings change and they won't last forever. If the feelings come up at a time when you really can't give them space, like a work meeting, remind yourself to check back in with them when you can.

**5. Be kind — to yourself.** Grievors tend to give themselves a really hard time for not doing grief right — whatever that "right" might be. Remind yourself you're doing the best you can in the moment and that it's okay you're having a hard time.

**6. Be a good friend — to yourself.** Experiment with telling yourself you can do this, even if you don't know what you're doing. You might be feeling emotions you've never had before or doing things in life for the first time and all of it is happening without the person who died. Take a moment to acknowledge how new and different this is and tell yourself, "Even if I'm overwhelmed right now, I will figure this out." And then...

**7. Ask for help.** We know, this one can be really hard and scary to do. Keep it simple and remember that people usually want to help, they are just waiting to be asked.

**8. Take time to celebrate whatever is going well.** When you're grieving it can be hard to make space for feeling good. You might feel guilty if you find yourself laughing or having a good time. Taking a break from grief doesn't mean you love or miss the person any less.

## IF YOU NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT