“It is natural and normal to mourn the loss of anything that is morally good or even morally neutral. However, destructive or inappropriate grief can lead to serious depression. It is normal to grieve the loss of a loved one; but note how Paul would help us guard against destructive grief over a loved one who has died in the Lord:

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (I Thessalonians 4:13-14)

“We are protected from destructive grief when our hope lies in the finished work of Christ, not in the things of this world that we have no right or ability to control. We grieve for that which we have lost because we have become attached to certain people, places, ideas and things. The extent of the grief is determined by the degree of attachment we had, whether appropriate or otherwise.” (Anderson and Baumchen, 1999)

**STAGES OF GRIEF**

When experiencing a loss, people typically go through a predictable cycle of grief:

Denial—“This can’t be happening.”
Anger—“Why is this happening to me?” or “This is not fair!”

Bargaining—“Maybe I can change this.”

Acceptance—Realizing the situation cannot be changed.

Reconstructing life to find enjoyment again.

Although these stages are predictable, everyone grieves differently and may navigate them in a different order.

Several factors may influence a person’s reaction to loss and affect the severity and duration of each stage:

- Support system
- Mental state/stability
- Nature of the relationship
- Past experiences and beliefs
- Circumstances of the death

### COMPLICATED GRIEF

Instead of acceptance, some fall into depression and hopelessness, which can develop into a more serious problem called complicated or destructive grief. Many symptoms of complicated grief are similar to the natural process of grief, but instead of gradually subsiding, they persist for more than six months, and may even increase. Many who suffer complicated grief describe feeling “stuck,” with the inability to pull themselves out of a heightened state of mourning.

Signs and symptoms of complicated grief can include:

- Persistent, painful yearning for the lost loved one
- Constant thoughts and images of their loved one
- Unrelenting anger and bitterness
- Desperate loneliness and helplessness
- Total loss/absence of meaning and purpose
- Heavy drinking or substance abuse
- Continued denial of the death
- Severely disrupted sleep
- Inability to function normally
- Inability to trust others
- Isolation
- Wanting to die

### RISK FACTORS

Although researchers are not sure what specifically causes complicated grief, they have identified some factors that may increase the risk it developing, including:

- The loved one’s death was perceived as preventable
- The death was traumatic, sudden, premature, or by suicide
- A history of depression, anxiety, or other types of emotional instability
- The relationship had unresolved issues or conflict

### SOURCE

HELP FOR COMPLICATED GRIEF
A therapist can help with topics such as grief reactions, complicated grief symptoms, adjusting to loss and redefining life goals. Therapy can help survivors explore and process emotions, improve coping skills and reduce feelings of blame and guilt.

If symptoms of depression linger, an antidepressant medicine may help reduce certain complicated grief symptoms.

GUARDING AGAINST COMPLICATED GRIEF
Complicated grief can be helped by the following:

- **Allow yourself to feel the pain.** Grieving is a painful, but necessary, process. Work through difficult emotions and allow them to heal.
- **Be patient with yourself.** The process takes time. Your recovery may look different than someone else’s. You need to work through it at your own pace, on your own terms.
- **Talk things out.** Find a trusted, compassionate friend or family member who is a good listener. Get together with them consistently and allow yourself to talk, cry, and express your emotions.
- **Avoid unnecessary changes.** Wait for a few months before adding any additional stresses (such as changing jobs or moving) to your life. Maintaining some normalcy will help give you a sense of security.
- **Take care of your body.** Eat good, nutritious foods, get plenty of exercise, and try to maintain a regular sleep schedule. Physical activity releases stress and helps you sleep and feel better.
- **Confront difficult emotions and feelings of regret.** Forgive yourself, learn from it, and move on. Get help if you are feeling “stuck.”
- **Avoid self-medicating.** Dulling your pain with alcohol and drugs will only make things worse and can develop into a habit, or even addiction.
- **Plan ahead for special occasions.** Special occasions without a loved one are difficult. Plan ahead for Christmas, birthdays, anniversary, and other important dates. Do something special with others who understand and identify with your pain and loss. Create new memories.
- **Stay connected.** Be intentional about spending time with those who can let you cry and make you laugh. Pursue supportive, uplifting friendships. Consider joining a social club or volunteer for a cause your loved one valued.
- **Set new goals.** Choose to look forward to the future. Plan a simple weekend away or learn a new skill. Do something proactive to help you find enjoyable activities.
- **Join a grief support group.** It is therapeutic to be with people who are experiencing similar emotions and challenges.
THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

- **God is your protection**—You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your work. Psalm 119:114
- **God is always available when you need help**—God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1
- **God will not abandon you**—I will never leave you nor forsake you. Joshua 1:5
- **God will comfort you in times of trouble**—Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4
- **God has a plan for you**—For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:11, 13
- **God knows you intimately**—For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:13, 14
- **God longs to help the hurting**—The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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He is the author of *Journeys* and *Destinations*, two books on co-occurring disorders treatment, and the co-author of *Finding Hope Again: Overcoming Depression* with Dr. Neil T. Anderson.

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This information in this publication is not intended as a substitute for professional help or to be used as a diagnostic tool. If you have serious difficulties with anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues, please seek professional help.

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