



Balance In Grief B.I.G. Tip Sheet



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Depression in Grief: Embracing Light Amid Grief Depression

Grief shows up in many ways. It can bring sadness, loneliness, anger, restlessness, anxiety, forgetfulness, physical ailments, and depression, to name a few. In the first few months after a loss, it's common to experience many of these symptoms at once. When left unaddressed, they can linger and affect daily life.

Depression—defined as a depressed mood or loss of interest in activities that significantly disrupt daily functioning—often feels like a natural response to the devastation of losing a loved one. For the purpose of this tip sheet, we are focusing on **grief-related depression**, not **clinical depression**, which is a separate and more persistent condition that requires a different kind of treatment.

I often remind clients that most of us, at some point in life, have experienced symptoms that feel like depression: low mood, lack of interest in activities, fatigue, social withdrawal, sadness, and the urge to simply close the curtains, crawl into bed, and shut out the world. Research even suggests that these depressive states—marked by lethargy and low energy—may have evolved as a way to help the body conserve energy during overwhelming stress. This conservation can allow our bodies to focus on critical processes like healing or strengthening the immune system (National Institutes of Health).

While it may seem strange to think of depression as “helpful,” in the context of grief it can actually be a normal response. Recognizing it in this way may ease some of the fear or shame that can come with the experience.

That said, it's still important to address **grief depression** so it doesn't deepen the storm you're already navigating. Short stretches of depression—a few days or even a week—are often part of the natural grieving process. But when symptoms persist for long periods, when you find yourself completely isolating, or when self-care slips away (such as neglecting hygiene, nutrition, or sleep), these can be signs that something more serious is happening.

On the next page, you'll find a simple guide comparing the symptoms of grief and the symptoms of depression. This can help you identify whether your experience may require more comprehensive support. If you're unsure, consider reviewing it with a trusted friend or family member who can give you an outside perspective.

I also encourage you to reach out to your primary care physician. Let them know you've experienced a significant loss and are dealing with grief or grief-related depression. They can help you determine the right steps for your overall health and well-being.

While depression can feel overwhelming, it is treatable. Many people find relief by practicing consistent self-care, reaching out for support, and engaging with resources like this tip sheet. The effort you put into caring for yourself is not only valid—it's necessary. And remember, the steps you're taking now are courageous ones. They are steps your loved one would want you to take toward healing

Depression vs. Grief

It is normal to experience depression during the grieving process. This depression can leave you feeling physically exhausted, with little motivation to complete even the simplest daily tasks that once came easily. Friends and loved ones may try to “cheer you up” or encourage you to “get out of the house” in an effort to lift your spirits. While their intentions are caring, they often don’t fully understand the complexities of grief.

For those with a history of anxiety or clinical depression, there can be an added fear that grief will worsen existing struggles. It’s important to recognize, however, that **grief-related depression** and **clinical depression** are not the same. Although the symptoms can look alike, the recovery process is very different.

Understanding these differences can not only reassure you that what you’re experiencing may be part of a natural grief response, but also help you recognize when it may be time to seek professional support. Below is a comparative look to give you insight into the differences.

Symptoms of Depression

- Intense sadness—Feeling deeply sad without a specific reason or focus.
- Sleep disturbances—Insomnia, difficulty falling asleep at night, sleeping a lot during the day. Feeling like you just want to sleep all the time.
- Change in appetite—Eating too much or too little. Changes in weight by more than 5% either gained or lost.
- Fatigue—Feeling tired, lack of energy, body aches.
- Irritability—Can be triggered by anything. Noise, touch, silence, people present, being alone.
- Lack of Motivation—Loss of desire, decreased interests in anything once enjoyed.
- Feeling worthless—Preoccupation with worthlessness. Devaluation of living.

Symptoms of Grief

- Intense sadness—Feeling sad that is focused on loss and changes that occur due to loss.
- Sleep disturbances—Insomnia, difficulty falling asleep at night. Mind is preoccupied with thoughts. Waking up and recognizing loss.
- Change in appetite—Not feeling like eating. Feeling nauseous, unable to eat. Not wanting to cook or plan meals.
- Fatigue—Feeling tired, lack of physical energy.
- Irritability—Emotionally sensitive to activities, things people say and responsibilities that need to be done.
- Lack of Motivation—Loss of interest in activities or interests done prior to loss.
- Feeling worthless—Grief does not usually extinguish self confidence but can cause temporary fear of the future and what to expect.

The key difference between **clinical depression** and **grief-related depression** is in how the symptoms unfold. Grief is often experienced in *waves*—periods of sadness and heaviness that come and go—whereas clinical depression tends to be a prolonged, downward spiral.

For example, someone who is grieving may feel depressed and withdraw to their room with the blinds drawn, but usually only for a few days at a time. In contrast, for someone with clinical depression, those days can stretch into weeks. People who are grieving may still notice moments of relief—occasional good days or brief glimpses of joy—even in the midst of deep pain. For those with clinical depression, however, good days are rare or absent, and even basic self-care routines, like showering, brushing their hair, or keeping up with household tasks, can fall away completely.

If you notice symptoms of depression that persist for more than two weeks without improvement, it’s important to see your doctor right away to receive appropriate care and support.

1. Understanding Depression in Grief

- **What it is:** Grief-related depression often brings deep sadness, pervasive low energy, diminished interest in daily activities, or feeling emotionally numb.

Why it matters: This isn't the clinical depression you "should" just get over—it's a natural way your heart and body respond to profound loss.

2. Gentle Ways to Feel Supported Now

- **Label the emotion:** Say to yourself, "*This heaviness is part of mourning.*" Recognizing it softens the inner criticism.
- **Reachable kind acts:** Even small comforts—a soft blanket, a favorite song, a gentle scent—can anchor you in moments when the weight feels overwhelming.

Mini-support calls: A brief check-in with someone who cares, even if just to say, "I'm not okay," can crack open emotional isolation.

3. Reflecting with Tender Awareness

- **Clarify your feelings:** What might you be missing most—shared routines, laughter, feeling seen? Naming these voids brings emotional clarity.
- **Pen your grief mindfully:** Allow yourself to write without editing—each word is a step toward release.

Reframe hopeful truths: Shift "I'll never feel joy again" to "Joy may return, even if slowly." This doesn't force positivity—it invites permission.

4. Connection Practices to Gently Lift Spirits

- **Invite someone in:** Let a trusted friend simply listen—sometimes being heard is healing.
- **Join grief communities:** Even quietly showing up offers soft reminders: you aren't alone.

Meaningful rituals: Perhaps lighting a memory candle or creating a small tribute—tiny acts of remembrance can nurture emotion and connection.

5. Daily Practices for Mood Care

- **Start gently:** A simple stretch, the morning sun, or a moment of quiet can feel nurturing amid heaviness.
- **Self-compassion cues:** Phrases like, "*I'm allowed to feel this deeply,*" serve as emotional balm.

Track small wins: Did you drink water? Step outside? Speak kind thoughts? Celebrate these gentle achievements.

6. Building a Soothing Routine

- **Set soft anchors:** A grounding ritual—tea, journaling, nature—provides rhythm and comfort when energy feels low.
- **Tiny, meaningful goals:** Replace “I must be productive” with, “*Today I will pause and allow feelings to exist.*”

Scheduled safe space: Dedicate moments for reflection or rest, easing the pressure of unexpected emotional surges.

7. Seeking Compassionate Support

- **Grief-informed care:** A grief coach or therapist who understands the BEST Results method can guide you in rediscovering emotional balance.

Understand emotion layers: Differentiating between “grief depression” and clinical depression supports clearer, kinder self-responding.

Your Actionable Checklist

Step	Action
1	Recognize grief-related depression as a natural response.
2	Lean into small comforts and kind gestures.
3	Reflect gently and rewrite harsh thoughts.
4	Reach out or participate in grief-sharing spaces.
5	Practice daily, small acts of self-care and awareness.
6	Build gentle routines and honor emotional pauses.
7	Seek grief-informed support when you're ready.

Wrap-Up:

Depression in grief isn't a failure—it's part of a soul's tender, powerful journey through love and loss. This guide invites gentle curiosity, quiet compassion, and hope—even in the smallest moments.



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