How Long Does Grief Last?

Everyone who has ever grieved wonders: How long will this grief persist? How long must I feel sorrow and pain? We don’t like feeling uncomfortable. We detest that complex mix of feelings that grief engenders. We may feel like victims of our feelings, wishing they would just disappear.

As a culture, we want everything to be quick and easy. We don’t savor feelings any more than we savor the wide range of our varied life experiences. Like all else that we hurry through in life, we may be obsessed with getting through our pain as quickly as possible.

Grief has no time table
How long does grief take? The real answer is that grief takes as long as it takes, whether that’s a week, a month, a year or more depending on whom we have lost and how this death affects us. Grief is a process we must move through, not over or around. Even when we can temporarily deny our pain, it still exists. It will eventually erupt in some way, maybe at an inappropriate moment or during another upset or illness. It is always better to admit our strong feelings, to feel them, and to move through them in order to move beyond them.

What does getting over it mean? It means not being forever in pain over our loss. It means we don’t forget or stop loving the person we lost. We do not always have to grieve; we can remember without pain.

Trusting that grief will not last forever
Too often we hear the awful message that we never stop grieving, never get over our loss. When we have no tools for overcoming sorrow, and when the world tries to shut us up, grief does go on longer. The belief that we will never recover from a loss can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, if we let it. When we believe we can recover, we do. It is important to trust that grief is not forever.

I believed I would grieve forever when my brother died. I kept sorrow alive for fourteen years by believing it was endless. I didn’t know how to stop my grief. Grief that persists for years can keep us living in the past; keep us from loving the people who are still alive. I was stunted by my grief, afraid to trust, afraid to commit, afraid to have children I might lose. It wasn’t until a good therapist helped me express fully how much this loss hurt me that I was able to stop grieving.
No matter how much we may hurt today, we must remember that grief is temporary. Mourning does not have to last forever. We can finish crying and express all our many feelings around this loss. We can find in ourselves the courage to recover and heal. We can begin to live fully and love again.

**Finding support**
Many people find it helpful to talk about their grief with someone who understands what they are going through. Expert counselors and support groups exist that can provide you with support and understanding and suggest ways to handle the challenges you face.

The following resources can help you and your family:

**T*A*P*S (The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors)**
www.TAPS.org
1-800-959-TAPS (1-800-959-8277)
TAPS is a national organization that offers a broad range of support, mentoring, and other services to those grieving the loss of a loved one whose death occurred while serving in the armed forces. TAPS services include the following:

- a nationwide peer support network
- information and resources on coping with grief and trauma
- 24/7 support via the TAPS hotline (1-800-959-TAPS)
- resources and material online
- weekly online support groups
- a quarterly magazine for casualty survivors

These services are offered free of charge, and no membership dues are charged.

In addition, TAPS clients mark their calendars for Memorial Day weekend in Washington, DC to attend the Annual “National Military Survivor” seminar and annual “Good Grief Camp” for kids and young survivors.

**Your installation’s support services**
Depending on your service branch, your Fleet and Family Support Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Airman and Family Readiness Center, or Army Community Service Center can provide you with information and support.
Military OneSource
This free 24-hour service, provided by the Department of Defense, is available to all active duty, Guard, and Reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues. You can reach the program by telephone at 1-800-342-9647 or through the Web site at www.militaryonesource.com.

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