

When You're Older and Coping With Loss

The death of close friends and family members becomes increasingly common as you get older. However, the end of a loved one's life doesn't have to disable yours. Oftentimes, therapy can be of tremendous help in coping with loss and the feelings it can bring, such as pervasive sadness, isolation, hopelessness, or worthlessness.



Too often, a person's attitude is one of the biggest obstacles to getting help. Many people believe that they're too old to get help or that looking to therapy is a sign of weakness or moral failing. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Therapy is a treatment process that offers specialized techniques of caring that have been designed to provide support, insight, and guidance. You're never too old to benefit from the life-strengthening benefits of therapy.

Your therapist can provide help and support your efforts in some of the following important areas:

Expressing Your Grief

Expressing your sadness is the first step in accepting a loss. Therapy offers a confidential, comforting setting in which to express your feelings and the therapeutic relationship permits you to safely explore even your most deeply felt sources of loss.

Staying Connected

It's important to spend as much time as you can with friends and family and to continue going to places where people know you, like your place of worship or a social group in which you regularly participate. Your therapist can help guide and encourage your efforts to stay connected.

Pursuing Your Interests

Finding ways to continue enjoying life is not disrespectful to the memory of your loved one. If you find it's too difficult to enjoy an interest the two of you once shared, you and your therapist can together explore ideas for new activities you can make your own.

Throughout your lifetime, you have most likely been the person whom others have looked to for help in times of trouble. Know that it's okay for you to be at the receiving end of care and attention.

Return To Normal

We each have our own way of surviving losses. Some of us will seek solitude and find that the well-intentioned inquiries and expressions of sympathy from others only revive the pain. However, as in recovering from any trauma, physical or mental, a progressive return to our usual life of work, family, and friends is most important. The longer we put it off, the slower our recovery will be.

We can begin to help ourselves by thinking through the challenges of starting to live without the deceased person. Perhaps outlining a schedule of the day-to-day tasks can help us to structure our day and get us moving back into a normal routine.

Reconnecting with friends, going back to work or school, and beginning to pick up the threads of our lives can help us to deal with feelings of numbness, lethargy, and paralysis.

Attending to our physical needs is essential during this time. Get enough sleep. Go to bed a bit earlier and sleep a bit later. Plan your meals so that you are eating properly. Work some exercise into your daily routine. Remember just as our emotional self is affected by the loss of a loved one, so is our physical self. Even having a physical exam by a physician can help us to take care of ourselves as we continue to heal.