

Grief Counseling

Why might I want to contact a Grief Counselor?

Many people feel they can deal with the loss of a loved one with the support of their family and friends. Sometimes, though, people feel they need a little assistance in understanding the process of grief work. Though there is no such thing as a shortcut through grief, a grief counselor can help you explore the consequences of the death, and this can lead to a greater understanding of your loss. And as avoiding grief does not shorten its tenure but actually lengthens its experience, working through your loss with someone who is trained to be attentive and nonjudgmental can be invaluable. Also, a grief counselor can advise you of tools to use in your grief work, and help you develop positive coping skills along the way.

Sometimes it is hard to tell what is “normal” grief and what is not; sometimes it might feel like you really *are* going crazy, or as though it is “taking forever” to get through your grief. In these cases, professional support can be very helpful.

How do I find a Grief Counselor?

Hospices, self-help bereavement groups, personal physicians, counseling centers, funeral homes, and hospitals often maintain a list of referrals for reliable grief counselors. Referrals given by friends or family who have had good experiences with their own counselors are another way to find a counselor. However, the best indicator of how you’ll like working with a counselor is by trusting your own instinct and common sense. You can begin by calling a prospective counselor to set up an appointment for an introductory visit. In many ways, this call will serve as a short “interview,” and you can learn much about how you might like working with that counselor.

- It helps to compile a list of questions to ask the counselor before you call. Based on the answers they give, you’ll know if you will feel comfortable working with them or not.
- Some good indicators are: Are they willing to spend time with you, answering your questions? Do you like how they answer the questions, or do they make you feel uncomfortable?

Sample questions

1. Before you call, ask yourself: What am I looking for in a counseling relationship? Do I want: support – tools – education – someone to just listen?

Asking yourself this will help you clarify the kinds of questions you ask, and also help you as you listen to the counselor’s answers.

2. What are your fees? Do you take my insurance? Do you offer a “sliding scale?”

This might seem like a simple question, but you can actually tell a lot about how you will like working with the counselor by how they answer this question, no matter what the answer is.

3. What is your training? What is your experience?

A grief counselor should have training in psychology, professional counseling, or social work, as well as training and/ or certification in death-related issues, grief management, and bereavement.

4. What is your attitude toward grief? How do you “define” grief?

Most grief counselors understand that grief is a natural part of life and a growth process that we all must go through; it might be problematic if they see grief as a “problem” that they must help you “get over.”

5. How long would you expect I’ll need to be seeing you?

As grief is a process, there are no quick cures! Don’t accept one. Instead, look for a counselor who is flexible and realistic about the length of the grief process.

After you have found a grief counselor you think you might like to work with, it is a good idea to check in on your relationship after a couple of sessions with him or her. If you feel comfortable with this counselor and he or she is empathetic, clear about the process of counseling, reasonably flexible, and unafraid to help you look honestly at your experience of grief, then you probably have found a good counselor! A counseling relationship is best when you are able to work through your grief in a safe way that allows you to find what is meaningful to you in your experience of loss.

