

Life is full of loss.

Yikes, that's a heavy way to start. But it's important to tell you the truth, and that's the truth. Other truths are that life is an amazing gift and full of beauty, that you will love many things and people in your life, and that it is good to love and be loved because that's what God made us for. But when you lose something you love—or, even worse, when you lose someone you love and who loved you—it hurts, bad. That pain is called grief.

Grief feels very personal, because it touches the deepest part of our hearts, and it is a reminder of our unique relationships, experiences, and dreams. When we have a loss, it can feel like we are the only ones who have ever felt this way before. How could any other person know what it's like to watch your parents fight all the time? How could they know the exact smells that you will miss from your grandmother's kitchen, or the tree trunk where you carved your initials in the backyard of a home you have to leave?

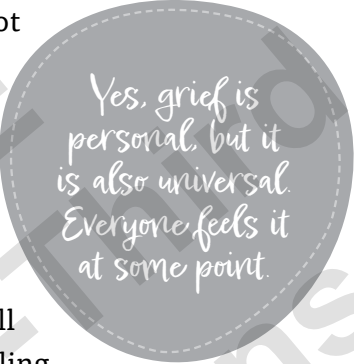
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Yes, grief is personal, but it is also universal. Everyone feels it at some point. Don't be tempted to believe the lie that you are alone in what you are feeling. Also, it won't last forever. Two things you will read over and over in the coming pages are "you are not alone" and "be patient." Although your disappointment or pain is yours alone, this booklet will share some universal concepts and ideas that might help you understand your very personal feelings.



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In the first three sections, you'll read some general advice about dealing with grief: what to expect, who to talk to, and how to take care of yourself. After that, you'll read sections about different kinds of grief. Of course, everyone will experience grief differently and at different levels of intensity. The grief over moving from your childhood home is not as intense as the grief over the loss of a parent or sibling. These ideas are not here to suggest how you *should* react but to give you a sense of how you *might* react. Hopefully, you will find that there are people out there who understand a bit of what you're going through, and you will feel more confident about finding the support you need.

What can I expect?

What can you expect after a loss? Honestly, expect anything and everything. You'll have a range of feelings that can change suddenly. Things might happen that you don't at first associate with grief, and you will only realize afterwards that they are related.

As an example, at two points in my life when I was dealing with grief, I became extremely clumsy. My mind was preoccupied with loss, and my distraction led to lots of slips, both physical and mental.

Speaking of physical effects: there can be many. Grief seems on the surface to be a problem of the heart, but it can affect the whole body. Sleeplessness, aches and pains, headaches (especially after crying!), lack of appetite, you name it, it could pop up.

Early on, you'll be thinking about your loss all the time. Little things might remind you of what you've lost, and these can easily trigger tears, hurt, or distraction. Your imagination might take you on wild rides—what if this hadn't happened? What if it was all a dream? You might imagine the future and then picture an alternate future in which life is like what it was before.

Hopefully, there are people in your life who will want to comfort you, though with your emotions changing often, what comforts you one day might not help at all the next

day. Some people won't know what to say. Some people will try to be helpful but say something that makes you more upset or seems insensitive. In my experience, everyone is trying to do the right thing for people who have suffered a loss. If you're able to communicate directly what you need and want, that can help. But it's also not your job, especially when the loss is fresh, to help other people figure out what to say.

Relationships are always changing, but trials and tragedy can accelerate those changes. You might blame people and feel angry at them. You might be short-tempered in general. These reactions, like all the ones described here, are totally normal. But if you're lashing out or hurting people, take some responsibility for your actions. You can tend to your own heart and be sensitive to others at the same time. If you need help doing this, find someone to talk to (more on that in a few pages).



There is no right way to grieve. Be patient with yourself and your process.

As important as how you treat others is how you treat yourself. Describing all these ways grief might affect you isn't meant to scare you but aims to let you know that you're not abnormal in any way. Don't let your own reactions make you feel even worse by worrying that they are not the "right" reactions. There is no "right" way to grieve. Be patient with yourself and your process. Take care of your physical health. Surround yourself with people who build you up, and get help when you need it.

When you get cut from a sport or activity

You went to school every day last week with one thing on your mind: tryouts at the end of the day. You leaped out of bed each morning and replayed your performance in your head each night. You gathered with your friends near the lockers during downtime to talk about how things went.

Whether you were trying out for a sport or an artistic activity like the school play or select choir, the energy of those tryouts transformed your days. There's nothing like the adrenaline rush that comes when the final list is posted.

And there's nothing like the crushing feeling of finding out that your name is not on it.

First, you might feel embarrassed. Everyone knew you were excited about this. Everyone saw how hard you tried. Do you feel tempted to save face by pretending that you didn't care in the first place? It's always better to be honest.

Now all your friends are going to do something cool after school every day, and you won't be a part of it. FOMO, or fear of missing out, can be a real fear. Friendships and social groups shift in ways we can't predict; it's normal to be nervous about what might change.

It can be hard to feel happy for your friends if you're feeling left out, but part of being a good friend means being supportive. Once your initial disappointment softens, focus on letting your love for your friends be stronger than your negative emotions. You might even try to find ways to be

involved, like helping as a team manager or working stage crew for the play. Even though you want to hide when you first hear the news, if you give it time and are willing to try something new, you might find a different role that keeps you involved and helps you develop new skills and talents.

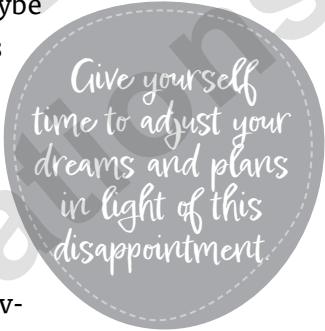
Figuring out some social solutions to your embarrassment and FOMO could be the easy part, depending on how important this activity is to you. If you've been dreaming of the NHL or Juilliard, getting cut can seriously shake that dream. Maybe you're starting to see that even though you love what you do, even though you have some skill, you might not reach the highest level. Or maybe you are starting to see that those dreams don't really fit you anymore.

Being unsettled by this is a normal part of growing up. If you've been asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" your whole life, and the answer you gave revolved around whatever you just got cut from, letting go will hurt.

Everyone has dreams die at some point in their life. Without a doubt, this is a loss, and you will grieve.

Give yourself time to adjust your dreams and plans in light of this disappointment. Missing out on an activity doesn't change who you are, even if it feels like it messed with your identity. Your identity doesn't come from what you achieve or what you do. Your identity is that you are someone who is loved by God, someone who was created to love and be loved.

You can still be a good friend, an artist or athlete, and an interesting person even if these tryouts didn't go your way.



Give yourself
time to adjust your
dreams and plans
in light of this
disappointment.

Bible verse and prayer

I praise you,
because I am wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works!
My very self you know.

PSALM 139:14

*Dear God, help me see below the surface of who I am.
It's hard not to be confused when I can't do what I think I'm
meant to do. When I see myself through your eyes,
I know that I'm loved for more than my wins
or starring moments. The better I know your love,
the more I will truly shine. Amen.*



When you have to move

While saying goodbye to people is undeniably harder, saying goodbye to places can cause some big feelings too.

I might not be the best person to give perspective on this. When my family moved during my childhood, it felt like the most wrenching thing imaginable. I was preoccupied, said a dramatic goodbye to my class at school, and basically thought the world was ending.

I was six, the new house was a mile from our old one, and I wasn't even switching schools. The point is I'm at one end of the spectrum when it comes to being attached to places.

You probably have a more moderate attitude! Still, moving is a big transition that means some goodbyes.

Often, we move because of a big family transition. If that's a painful one like a job loss or parents separating, the move can feel even harder. When you're young, these big decisions are not yours to make, and it can be really unsettling to feel so powerless when you're right on the edge of growing up.

Being able to let go of things is a good life skill. Some spiritual traditions describe this as "detachment." In Catholic spirituality, this doesn't mean having no attachments at all, but putting value on the right attachments in your life. We can be so focused on keeping things the way they have always been that we miss out on new opportunities, or we fail to value certain things in our lives because we are intent on avoiding change.

As I mentioned above, life changes affect everyone differently based on their personality and experiences. If you are someone who is resistant to change, moving will probably have a deeper effect on you than it might for someone else. There's no way around those feelings, but you can try to focus your mind on the positive possibilities to balance your emotional response.

SAYING GOODBYE TO PEOPLE

Living somewhere means getting to know the cast of characters that lives around you. Maybe you made a friend in the apartment next door, or you've gotten to know a family on the block that always hosts cookouts. You'll be able to keep in touch with them, but you won't see them daily anymore. Depending on how far you're moving, you might be saying

goodbye forever. These transitions are part of life. It sounds cliché, but you can look forward to the new friendships you will form over time in your new place.

SAYING GOODBYE TO PLACES

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” This opening line from a poem (titled “God’s Grandeur”) by Gerard Manley Hopkins is one way to describe how God can be found in places and things. By extension, places and things can have deep meaning for us. Wherever you are moving from is filled with memories of experiences and relationships. The memories will remain but may feel more distant when you are physically distant.

Places keep a part of us. We are often creative in our homes; we paint rooms a favorite color and build forts in the backyard. You carry that creativity, and your capacity for friendship, to wherever you go next. Don’t be ashamed to be sad over your goodbyes, and be patient as you build a sense of home in your new place.

Bible verse and prayer

One thing I ask of the Lord;
this I seek:
To dwell in the Lord’s house
all the days of my life,
To gaze on the Lord’s beauty,
to visit his temple.

PSALM 27:4