



Self Help

Managing grief when you have borderline personality disorder

Grief is a normal response that occurs when a person experiences loss. While there are many types of loss, the focus of this fact sheet is grief following the death of a person or pet. Grief may be especially difficult to process for people with borderline personality disorder (BPD) due to strong overwhelming emotions. It is important to remember that grief is complex and that everyone will have unique experiences of grief.

Experiences of grief

People who have experienced loss may experience one or more of the following:

Emotional reactions, such as sadness, shock and disbelief, anger or resentment (including anger that the person has abandoned you), feelings of helplessness or hopelessness, panic, irritability, denial, relief, guilt (including guilt that you survived or that you could not save the person who died), feeling you do not want to live, loneliness, anxiety or fear (including anxiety about the future), or longing for the person or pet that was lost.

Cognitive symptoms, such as difficulty concentrating, confusion, forgetfulness, obsessive thinking, or vivid dreams.

Physical sensations, such as headaches or body pain, numbness, feeling 'heavy' or sluggish, loss of energy, changes in sleep, appetite or sex drive, or restlessness.

How do people with BPD experience grief

People with BPD may experience grief more intensely compared with others. For example, grief may heighten symptoms of BPD. People with BPD may experience grief more intensely compared with others. Experiencing grief may even heighten symptoms of BPD, such as:

- Strong feelings related to rejection or abandonment by others, which can be heightened by the loss of a person or pet.
- Increase in feelings of impulsivity and self-destructiveness when grieving
- Difficulties connecting with others and maintaining relationships following loss, such as difficulty trusting others or feeling detached from others.
- Difficulties with identity and sense of self may also be heightened by grief, such as feeling as though a part of themselves has died or feeling that life is meaningless without the person

Feelings come and go

A grieving person will experience ups and downs following their loss. This is similar to recovery from BPD, where a person may experience good and bad days. There is not a clear timeline for grief or an expected date where grief will be over. Pain will reduce over time, but a part of a person will always grieve the loss of the person or pet. Grief can be triggered at any time, and it is common to experience grief over an extended period of time.





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How to manage grief

- Acknowledge how you are feeling and try not to hide how you are feeling. Remember that it is ok to feel the way you do.

-Allow yourself to mourn. Mourning occurs when someone feels or expresses grief, including recognising loss and experiencing emotions related to the loss. For example, you may set aside time each day to remember your loss and experience feelings which come up.

-Take care of yourself through wellbeing practices and returning to a normal routine. Practices that may be helpful include exercising, listening to music, relaxation or mindfulness practices, balancing time with other people, eating healthily, meditation, and spiritual practices.

-Consider ways to remember the person or pet. For example, have a special farewell or remembrance ceremony, plant something to remember them, journal or write a song or poem about your memories together, share memories with another person, or keep special possessions such as your dog's favourite toy.

-Consider events or occasions which may be triggering or difficult and ensure that you have support in place during those times. Anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays are often difficult for people who are grieving.

-Consider asking other people to support you as appropriate. Be clear with what others can do to support you, such as preparing meals, assisting with childcare, or simply being with you.

-Avoid making major decisions after the loss of a person or pet.

-Avoid using drugs and alcohol to numb the pain.

-Consider talking to a health professional about your experiences of grief.

