



Is a Grief Support Group Right for Me? **What to Know Before Joining**

After the death of someone close, many around you may advise you to join a grief support group. We all find different ways to navigate through life's challenges and no two paths are the same when we talk about grief. We each have unique needs, interests, and ways of processing emotions. Because of these varying needs, there are many types of grief support services available. It's about finding what works best for you.

Individualized Grief Support

Individual, Couples or Family Therapy: Meet with a mental health professional individually, as a couple or family to tend to grief or other issues that may or may not be related to grief. With your therapist, you decide on your goals and the frequency of sessions. Therapy can be used to treat mental health diagnoses, process changes in life and/or achieve personal goals. You may consider therapy as part of your personal grief plan if you are experiencing challenges in addition to grief that need to be prioritized—for example, if a person's health, safety and/or wellbeing are at risk. Some may consider individual therapy if the idea of giving and receiving support with peers feels too overwhelming. Some may benefit from simultaneous therapy and group support.

Grief Counseling: Meet individually with a professional (a clergy member, spiritual director/advisor, life coach, etc.) who specializes in grief. A grief counselor isn't necessarily a mental health professional. You may consider grief counseling if you don't need mental health services and prefer an individual experience instead of or in addition to group.

Group-Based Grief Support

There are different styles and structures for a grief support group that may be considered in addition to or instead of individualized services. They vary in who forms and facilitates the group, and whether they are based on a curriculum with some amount of education or invite free-flowing topics among members. They may also differ in who is eligible to attend, based on cause of death, relationship to the person who died, the amount of time since the death, or identity of the griever. Groups may also be short-term or long-term and vary in the level of commitment expected from members. Some grief support programs offer open, drop-in groups where members are welcome to start at any time and attend as frequently as they choose, without a limit on the number of people who may be present. Others may be small, closed groups and allow only a certain number of members, predetermine the total number of sessions for the group and require members to commit to regular attendance. Below you will find further descriptions of different types of groups.

Mental Health Professional-Led Support Groups: Meet in a group formed and facilitated by a mental health professional, specifically for grievers. Mental health professionals are trained to identify and support issues like trauma, depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and other mental health related issues, in addition to natural grief. A group facilitated by a mental health professional may be considered when a person requires support in addition to what peers can offer and wants to give and receive support in a group of peers.

Peer-Led Support Groups: Meet in a group that is facilitated by a person who is also grieving the death of someone and doesn't necessarily have training as a counselor or therapist. This is not a mental health service. Peer-led grief support groups are often open, drop-in groups in which members do not make a formal commitment to the group and the membership changes from meeting to meeting. This should be considered when a person would like to give and receive support from a group of peers and is not in need of mental health services or already has an individual therapist. This can be helpful to someone whose schedule is hard to predict and may not be able to make a commitment.

Religious-Based Support Group: Meet in a group that is formed and facilitated by someone from a faith-based or religious organization. The structure of this type of group may vary based on the organization hosting and may be based in specific religious beliefs or philosophies. This is not a mental health service. You may consider this if you would like to give and receive support in a group of peers, who share similar religious beliefs, and you are not in need of mental health services or already have an individual therapist.



Volunteer-Led Grief Support Groups (OUR HOUSE): Meet in a group that is formed by mental health professionals and facilitated by trained and supervised volunteers, who aren't mental health professionals. This is not considered a mental health service. The focus of the group is on the 8-12 members connecting with and supporting one another throughout the duration of the group sessions. Members make a commitment to attending the group regularly. This should be considered when a person is not in need of immediate intervention and /or mental health services or is already connected to an individual therapist, wants and is able to give and receive support in a group of peers, and is able to make a commitment to attendance. Many benefit from simultaneous individualized professional support and group support.

Some questions for reflection as you discern what type of support is right for you:

- What do I imagine it will be like for me to be in a group of peers and to hear about the death, loss and grief experiences of others? What words come to mind first? Helpful, supportive, less alone? Or overwhelming, "too sad" or "depressing"? Or perhaps you still don't know what to expect?
- Have I participated in other types of groups in the past? What was my experience of a group at that time?
- What are my current needs? What am I hoping for by participating a group?

Challenges some members of OUR HOUSE grief support groups have experienced in the past:

- Small, closed groups can take months to form and this may be too long a wait for some
- Feeling that the grief experiences of the others in the group may be "too different" than one's own or vice versa
- Unable or unwilling to confront the challenging emotions of grief and/or tolerate others' pain and grief
- Feeling too overwhelmed by one's own grief or the grief of others to attend group sessions

Benefits some members of OUR HOUSE grief support groups have experienced in the past:

- The intimate setting of a small, closed groups has led to some very meaningful, lifelong connections
- Learning from others with varied grief experiences and ways of coping
- Feeling less alone in grief just by nature of meeting others going through their own grief process
- Learning more about oneself through sharing grief with others

If you would like some help exploring the types of support that might be right for you, you may contact OUR HOUSE Grief Support Center by phone at 310-473-1511 or through our web inquiry form on our website to speak with a member of our team who is a mental health professional and can talk through our services and if needed, provide referrals for other types of support that may be meaningful for you based on your needs. You can read more about OUR HOUSE Grief Support Center and our services on our website at www.ourhouse-grief.org.



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