



Aging adults and grief

Grief is not only the loss of loved ones. It can also be a loss of physical abilities. It can include losing independence or social connections. Listed below are some ways aging adults can experience loss.¹

Multiple losses

- Older adults may experience multiple losses in a brief period—friends, spouses, family members, or even the loss of roles or identities (such as retirement or caregiving roles)

Physical and cognitive decline

- As people age, they may also face the physical and cognitive difficulties that come with aging, such as mobility issues, chronic illness, or dementia
- These conditions can worsen feelings of grief, making it more difficult to take care of self or find comfort in the same ways they did before
- The loss of physical function can also contribute to feelings of helplessness and isolation

Fear of mortality

- The death of peers or loved ones can remind aging adults of their own mortality
- This conflict with their own eventual death can stir up grief, anxiety, or feelings of dread
- This can be a time when individuals may need to confront unresolved issues, reflect on their own lives, and sometimes struggle with feelings of regret or unfinished business

Lack of support

- Many older adults struggle to find appropriate grief support
- They may feel that others do not understand their grief
- They may be hesitant to seek support because of generational differences in how grief is expressed or because they don't want to burden their loved ones²

Helping aging adults through grief

- Provide social support and allow time to grieve
- Normalize the grieving process and encourage healthy coping mechanisms
- Professional support and consider spirituality

1. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/grief-and-mourning/coping-grief-and-loss>

2. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8600102/>