

Different Grieving Styles

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Individuals often grieve in different ways. We can identify three different grieving styles, along a continuum. At one end is an intuitive style; at the other end is an instrumental grieving style; inbetween lies a blended grieving pattern.

- *Intuitive grieving style:* people with this style tend to respond to loss primarily in terms of emotion, feeling and expressing their emotions intensely. The griever may fear being overwhelmed by emotions.
- *Instrumental grieving style:* people with this style tend to respond to loss more cognitively, are less prone to emotional experience of the grief, and tend to express their grief in terms of thoughts and activity (thinking and doing rather than feeling). When emotional experience is present, it tends to be private rather than shared.
- *Blended grieving style:* most people probably fall into this category, combining both styles with an emphasis on one or the other depending on the person and the situation.

Some of the variation has to do with “personality type,” but may also be influenced by cultural, social and family influences. There is no ideal or preferred style, but those with a stronger preference for one style may have difficulty understanding how someone with a different style responds to a loss.

There is another aspect to this notion of differences in the way we grieve. There are different “strategies” for coping with grief, and here are some of the possibilities:

- *Affective/emotional strategies:* these include emotional expression, crying, connecting and sharing with others on an emotional level; finding times and places where it is ok to experience painful feelings.
- *Cognitive strategies:* these include logical analysis of the situation; redefining the loss to make meaning; seeking information and understanding; finding ways to avoid or minimize the loss.
- *Behavioral strategies:* these might include physical activity (running, chopping wood, creating a memorial); problem-solving and activity to accomplish tasks, planning for new directions etc.; acting-out behaviors (such as drinking, fighting, overeating).
- *Spiritual strategies:* these might include prayer, meditation, or other religious/spiritual practices to bring comfort; surrender to a higher power; seeking meaning from spiritual beliefs and outlooks.

The grieving style and adaptive strategies tend to go together. For instance, intuitive grievers are more likely to use affective/emotional strategies, and those with a more instrumental style are more likely to use cognitive and physical activity strategies. People with a more blended style may use a variety of strategies, depending on the situation and the particular loss they are experiencing. Sometimes we need to use strategies that are less comfortable and familiar to us, and then we may apply them less effectively. The more flexibility we can develop, the better - and the better we will understand others who tend to have a different style.