

RECOVER ARRIVE BECOME

CLINICAL THERAPY PRACTICE

WHEN GRIEF IS COMPLICATED BY TRAUMA

MAKING ROOM FOR BOTH LOSS AND THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Some losses include frightening, violent, sudden, or disturbing circumstances. Grief and trauma reactions can occur at the same time.

GRIEF AND TRAUMA CAN OVERLAP

- Grief may bring longing, sadness, anger, guilt, numbness, or changes in identity and routine.
- Trauma reactions may include intrusive images, nightmares, avoidance, hypervigilance, startle, or strong body reactions.
- Having trauma symptoms does not mean your grief is wrong, and intense grief does not automatically mean a disorder.

WHEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES INTRUDE

- The mind may repeatedly return to how the person died rather than memories of how they lived.
- Images, unanswered questions, medical details, news coverage, or legal proceedings can become hard to escape.
- You can limit unnecessary exposure to distressing details while still seeking information you genuinely need.

GUILT & 'WHAT IF' THOUGHTS

- Hindsight can make the past look more predictable than it was.
- Ask what you actually knew, controlled, and could realistically do at the time.
- Responsibility belongs with the person whose actions caused harm when violence or abuse was involved.
- You do not have to resolve every unanswered question in order to grieve.

ANNIVERSARIES & REMINDERS

- Dates, seasons, locations, smells, songs, court dates, or media stories can intensify reactions.
- Plan extra support around known reminders when possible.
- Lower demands, protect sleep, use grounding, and choose whether to participate in memorial traditions.
- There is no required timetable for feeling 'normal.'

SUPPORT BOTH NEEDS

- Grief may need remembrance, connection, meaning, ritual, and permission to miss the person.
- Trauma may need safety, grounding, gradual processing, boundaries, and nervous-system regulation.
- A trauma-informed grief clinician can help when one process keeps blocking the other.
- Culture, spirituality, family, and community can shape what healing looks like.

REACH OUT WHEN NEEDED

- Seek help when distress remains overwhelming, functioning is seriously affected, or trauma symptoms keep interfering with grieving.
- Call/text 988 if grief becomes a crisis or you are thinking about suicide.
- Call 911 for immediate danger.
- Support groups can also reduce isolation after traumatic loss.

You can remember the whole person - not only the way the loss happened.

RECOVERY • HEALING • RESILIENCE • YOU
www.recoverarrivebecome.org