

# Disenfranchised Grief: what it is & how to cope

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When someone in our life dies or we experience a transformational loss, we want to be supported by friends, family and our community while we grieve.

Typically, the loss is ritualized through private or public ceremony, such as a funeral. Society acknowledges our loss through acts of kindness and understanding, such as condolence

cards, social media posts, or visits, and meal delivery. We feel free to publicly announce our loss and are given space to grieve as long as it takes.

Under these ideal circumstances, the grieving process evolves naturally and life goes on. Far from ideal, disenfranchised grief is the total opposite of a healthy grieving experience.

Disenfranchised grief happens when a loss is neither publicly supported or acknowledged and remains invalidated. Disenfranchised grief has everything to do with society's views and can vary within families, friendship circles, cultures, etc. For grief to be considered disenfranchised, one or more scenarios may be true:

- The relationship before the loss or the loss itself is stigmatized, such as the death of an ex-spouse or a death from suicide or drug overdose;
- The loss, such as a loss of a pet or co-worker, is often regarded as less important than others;
- The grief goes unacknowledged, which can happen for example with a [pregnancy loss or miscarriage](#). In other instances, it can happen when the person who is grieving is either very young or very old.

- Since society associates grief with death, a transformational loss can be considered unimportant or not worthy of grief, such as a job loss, divorce or a [traumatic birth experience](#).

Grieving is hard, but disenfranchised grief can be traumatizing. The last thing someone who is grieving needs is to be judged or shamed for not “getting over” the loss quickly. Feeling like we aren’t living up to society’s unwritten rules about grief can lead to isolation, shame and guilt.



I wish I could say that unprocessed grief just disappeared over time, [but it doesn't](#). Left unattended, it can evolve into depression, anxiety and other mental health issues. Disenfranchised grief can reappear following another loss, intensifying an already difficult situation.

Whether you have been or are currently experiencing disenfranchised grief and don't know what to do about it, there is hope!

There are ways you can process the loss differently and gain a sense of emotional peace, regardless of how long ago your loss occurred.



First, validate yourself. Your thoughts and feelings are real and have purpose. Ask yourself, what do you feel today because of the loss and what do you need to move forward. Be with those feelings without judgment.

Acknowledge the grief through ritual. This can look different to different people. It could be a private ceremony, making art or memorializing the loss in other creative ways that has meaning to you.

Charlotte therapist [Daja Mayner, MSW, LCSW](#) points out that it's also important to consider the potential impact of unresolved grief in relationships or family systems. She explains that validating your grief is as crucial to your

healing as shielding yourself from the invalidating comments or attitudes you may receive from loved ones in the pursuit of processing your loss. Outlining your emotional needs during your grief journey can create opportunities for loved ones to become attentive or respectful of them without fully understanding your experience. For example, Ms. Mayner suggests that inviting your partner to participate in your new grieving ritual can provide a new path to deeper connection.

Lastly, you can seek guidance from a trained professional therapist. Therapists specializing in grief counseling can give you the individualized attention you need. In-person and online grief groups can also provide much needed community support. It is never too late to heal from grief.



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*Daja Mayner, MSW, LCSW hopes to challenge her clients to humanize themselves by encouraging them to extend grace and believe in their abilities to overcome life's difficulties. When working with clients she employs an ecosystemic approach that focuses on the implications of childhood and generational trauma on emotional well-being, self-concept and attachment patterns. [mindpathcare.com/staff/daja-mayner-msw-lcsw/](http://mindpathcare.com/staff/daja-mayner-msw-lcsw/)*



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<https://www.griefshare.org>

Article found at: <https://www.mindpathcare.com/blog/disenfranchised-grief-what-it-is-how-to-cope>