

COPING WITH TRIGGERS

WHAT ARE GRIEF TRIGGERS?

Grief can be triggered by anything that brings up memories related to our loss. They are little reminders that throw us back in time and ambush our emotions, causing anxiety and/or an emotional outburst.

WHAT TO KNOW

Because grief is unique as a fingerprint, triggers are highly individualized. For example, two parents who lost the same child may experience different triggers. Why? Because each parent has a unique personality, filters, and childhood experiences, and each had a unique relationship with that child. All of these individual components will dictate each parent's individual triggers. What to know:

- ☑ People experiencing the same loss may not have the same triggers
- ☑ Triggers may or may not lessen with time
- ☑ Triggers may be subtle or surprising

TRIGGER EXAMPLES

- ☑ **Music.** Studies show a link between music and memory. Certain songs can evoke joy or sadness. They also stimulate memories, transporting us back in time to emotional events. While one particular song might be triggering now, it's important to know that one day that same song might also bring comfort when your emotions aren't so raw.
- ☑ **Smells or sounds.** Scents and sounds also play a role in our memories, linking our experiences with our deceased loved one. Smells such as a flower, perfume, even cigarettes can hijack our emotions. Sounds such as a particular ring tone or the sound of a siren can be especially triggering.
- ☑ **Lost opportunities.** Lost opportunities often serve as a reminder of our deceased loved one's absence and/or evokes a feeling of having been robbed of that experience. For instance, when a friend's son weds, a grieving parent might feel robbed that they'll never see their own child walk down the aisle. When a widow or widower has their first grandchild, they are both overjoyed yet sad that their beloved will never get to hold the new little one.
- ☑ **Sights.** The sight of certain things such as a hospital, a certain color, someone's hair, or even something as simple as a school bus can trigger a wave of grief.
- ☑ **Special days.** Grief can be especially tender during cyclical or special calendar days, such as favorite holidays, birthdays, death or wedding anniversaries, etc. Even a particular season such as spring can be triggering.

HOW TO COPE

Coping with grief triggers is best managed by identifying your triggers, then proactively managing them. For instance, if a certain restaurant is triggering, avoid that restaurant for the time being. It doesn't mean you need to avoid it for the rest of your life . . . what is painful today may bring you comfort tomorrow. But for now, avoid potentially triggering situations until the rawness has softened.

- Identify your current triggers
- When you're triggered, reassure yourself that, in this moment, you are safe
- Remind yourself to breathe through the nose and exhale through the mouth
- Comfort yourself as best you can using your tactile senses, such as holding a soft blanket
- Consider removing yourself from the situation if possible
- Engage in an activity you love to help trigger endorphins and calm fear
- Avoid minimizing the trigger's significance even if you don't understand it

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

Name some triggers you're currently experiencing in your grief journey.

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- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Name some things you can do to help yourself manage current triggers.

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