

LOSING A LOVED ONE TO AIDS

by Kelly Baltzell M.A. &
Karin Baltzell Ph.D.



Losing a loved one to AIDS can be devastating. To compound the loss there is often a lack of effective grief support offered to people who have lost a loved one to AIDS. Research on this type of grief loss is scarce but there are some commonalities found in people suffering an AIDS related loss.



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1. **Increased Difficulty:** People who themselves are HIV positive will have more difficulty coping with the loss of a loved one who has died of AIDS than coping with the death if they were HIV free. This difficulty might manifest in increased drug use and increased chance of suicide.
2. **Multiple Losses:** If you have suffered multiple losses due to AIDS your grief may "add up" and it may be harder for you to heal. Because of the multiple losses you may also feel guilty for still being alive. This is called survivor guilt.
3. **Seeking Help:** Because of the type of loss you have suffered, you may feel like you will be shunned or looked down upon when seeking help from others. Try to work past the stigma associated with the disease and seek help. Look for support systems that are familiar with AIDS.
4. **Insensitivity By Others:** Normal support services available to grieving people may be insensitive, unintentionally, due to lack of knowledge. In addition, these traditional support services may be unable to effectively support and treat AIDS bereaved people because of a lack of training. Seek out professionals who are familiar with AIDS.
5. **Mixed Feelings:** You may experience a bundle of mixed emotions including anxiety, confusion, loneliness and anger – especially if you have had difficulties accepting your loved one's choice in lifestyle.
6. **Guilty Emotions:** People who have suffered an AIDS related loss normally have guilty feelings. Accept what was done for a loved one. Avoid falling into the "What if..." trap.
7. **Being Alone:** If you were the sole caregiver for a loved one dying of AIDS or one of a few care givers without a support structure, you are more likely to have greater grief symptoms than those that did not have a care taking role. Do not be alarmed about feeling the loss deeply.
8. **Support Groups Work:** Find a support group that is made up of other AIDS bereaved people. You'll find healing more easily if you have others who understand your type of grief and the issues associated with it. If there are none in your area you might want to consider starting your own. Or, you can search out support groups on-line.

Much more research needs to be done to understand how survivors of AIDS related losses grieve and heal. In the meantime, keep an eye on your physical and mental health. Make an effort to interact socially and, if possible, join a support group.