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## **Coping with Loss**

By Harrison Smythe

Grief and loss come in many different forms. From the passing of a loved one, to the breakdown of a relationship, the selling of a family home or the loss of a pet. All forms of adversity and how we respond to those experiences are valid and unique. At an advanced age most seniors have had a significant change in their relationships and daily life. Their friend circles may have gotten smaller, or they find it harder to communicate with their families. They may also find it harder to travel from home to their target destinations. These factors contribute to the elderly members of our community feeling depressed and isolated in their grief. There are, however, many tools that can help seniors work through the challenges and emotions that come with grief. One of the tools we offer is community.

Having a sense of community during times of grief can be a source of comfort and also empowerment. By sharing your voice, you can evaluate your own experiences, make new discoveries, and help others by listening and being present for their moments of vulnerability. The ability to share your thoughts in a safe space is an important factor in maintaining both emotional and mental health. There are many different types of community centered approaches,

the most common for seniors are at senior centers. These centers have a variety of programs ranging from creative/artistic events to self-help groups that target addiction to grief and loss. The grief and loss programs are important for seniors. These centers have a variety of programs ranging from creative events to self-help groups with targeted subjects of discussion. Meetings for grief and loss are organized with an open, collaborative approach, as everyone's process is different. The goal is not necessarily to change one's feelings, but to acknowledge and validate them. According to the website *The Encore Project* it states, "A significant benefit of community grief support is the social connection it fosters. Seniors, who often experience shrinking social networks due to the loss of loved ones or mobility issues, may find themselves feeling isolated." If they didn't have the space to talk about their losses or grievances, they are free to do so without judgement by people who have gone through similar experiences.

With that being said, there is sometimes a stigma amongst those seniors seeking mental help. On the website *Center for Grief and Trauma Therapy*, it states, "Unfortunately, the times and culture that raised today's older people created the unrealistic and painful mindset of "picking oneself up by the bootstraps" and suppressing their feelings rather than reaching out for support. Additionally, society tends to ignore the dynamic losses of older people. Seniors may find that those around them desensitize or invalidate their experiences, as though maturity lessens the complex emotions that come with unwanted change. "This stigma affects most senior populations in many different communities. The first best step to overcome this stigma is to reach out to your local community programs. According to the *National Institute of Aging*, it states, "Check with local hospitals and senior centers, nursing homes, religious groups, funeral homes, or your doctor to find support groups in your area." There are so many options for finding groups who have gone through similar experiences. It is very important for seniors

struggling with their grief and emotions to talk about their struggles, either with a professional or with peers.

## Sources

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