

# Coping with Your Grief Over the Uvalde Tragedy

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## Coping with Your Grief Over the Uvalde Tragedy

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Uvalde, Texas, is grieving. America is grieving. A single man has committed a crime of unimaginable violence, taking the lives of at least 21 people—19 of them children—and now an entire country is bereft.

Whether you live near Uvalde or far away, whether you personally know someone connected to the tragedy or not, you are probably grieving. Because you have empathy, you are grieving on behalf of the families whose loved ones were so senselessly taken from them. Grief is normal and necessary. In addition, you may be experiencing a loss of a sense of safety for your own family and others you care about. You may have lost a sense of goodness in the world. You might also have lost trust or pride in your country or community. You are also probably wrestling with why this happened, as well, and your search for answers is part of your grief. As the Director of the Center for Loss & Life Transition, please know that your grief is normal and necessary. In these early days, you are likely to feel numbed by shock and disbelief. This is nature's way of protecting us from acknowledging the full reality of a terrible loss all at once. You may be struggling with anger, helplessness, sadness, despair, and other emotions as well, especially now, at a time when other worldwide events are already stressing everyone's mental health.

Whatever you are feeling, it's OK. Your feelings are not right or wrong—they simply *are*. Accepting your emotions and finding constructive ways to express them, bit by bit, day by day, are how you can best work through your grief.

If you find yourself thinking and talking about the violent act, this is also normal. Trying to understand what happened is what our minds often do. If this is true for you, the ongoing process of learning more about what happened and discussing the shooting with others will likely help you begin to survive this difficult time.

If, however, as a result of the murders you find yourself battling with nightmares or insomnia, paralyzing fears about the deaths, panic attacks, or other severe symptoms, you may be struggling with traumatic grief, which is a close cousin to post-traumatic stress, or PTSD. If this is true for you, please talk to your family doctor or therapist about the intensity of your response. They can help you manage your most disabling symptoms and find ways to continue functioning day to day.

Over time and with the support of others, your grief can be integrated into your life. The key to getting through this terrible time is expressing your inner grief outside of yourself. This is called mourning. Ways to mourn include talking about your thoughts and feelings with others, crying, journaling, writing condolence cards to the families directly affected, participating in an online support group, praying or other spiritual practices, making art, helping others in your community, and anything that helps you feel like you are sharing or demonstrating your thoughts and feelings in some way. Active, ongoing mourning gives your grief movement and is the process through which you will eventually reconcile your grief.

I especially encourage you to reach out to others. We as human beings need personal contact. When we are grieving, we also need emotional support. So I urge you to use this difficult time to build relationships. Talk openly and honestly with the people in your home and be as empathetic as you can. Stay connected as much as possible and be open and honest in those communications about whatever it is you are feeling or struggling with at the moment. Your candor will encourage others to be honest as well, creating the opportunity for mutual support and kindness. My thoughts and prayers are with you.

## About the Author

Dr. Alan Wolfelt is an author and educator on the topic of healing in grief. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is a past recipient of the Association of Death Education and Counseling's Death Educator Award. Dr. Wolfelt has written many compassionate, bestselling books in an effort to help people mourn well so they can continue to love and live well, including *Healing Your Traumatized Heart*. Visit [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com) to learn more about the natural and necessary process of grief and mourning.