

# Grief support groups

Dear Denise:

I heard recently that there is some kind of grief support group for those who have lost loved ones through addiction. Do you know about this group and is there one nearby?

Lynn

Dear Lynn:

I do have some information for you about this. But, first let me take this opportunity to talk a little about grief in the world of addiction.

I often hear from people who aren't experiencing addiction in their own family but have friends or co workers who are. They complain about how the people are "enabling" their addicted loved ones and letting them take advantage of them. They often suggest that if it was their loved one they would never let this happen.

I can tell you from my own experience that unless or until this happens in your world, you really don't know what you would do. I, mistakenly, was very critical at one point in time, when I had friends dealing with this issue and I wasn't. Then it came into my life and it really was an education! When it is a child of yours, someone you raised and remember in many wonderful ways, it's difficult not to think about this person in relationship to the past. One kind of grief many of us experiences is the loss of a child when the child is still alive. This person on drugs is not who you remember, who you know is "in there" somewhere. It first is frustrating to see the change and downward spiral and then it is sad and somewhat frightening. Where is my child? Who is this person? What did they do with my child? We desperately want to "find" them and bring them back but in a way we have lost them. And so we grieve. In our desperation and hope sometimes we will do just about anything to "revive" them and bring them back to the life we remember, our "baby". In this current world of the opioid epidemic, we often grieve while they are still breathing and then have to grieve when we lose them.

When it comes to enabling I always suggest to people to do what is comfortable for them. There are so many overdose deaths these days people often fear for the lives of their sons and daughters. Rightly so. All people handle this "enabling" in their own way. They need to do what they are comfortable with and hope if death occurs they feel they have done what in their mind was best for everyone, including themselves.

When loved ones are lost to addiction we grieve in many ways. There is often guilt, regrets, profound sadness, great emptiness. This is the case when we lose a loved one, in general. Getting to your original question now, there are groups who are specific to those who have lost loved ones through addiction. These groups have become necessary because of the stigma that comes with addiction. Denise Cullen, a mom who lost her son about 10 years ago, had begun attending a grief group to get support after her son died. She quickly realized that even though everyone in the group had similar feelings of loss and despair, they were judgmental of her because her son died from "bad choices". Most of the attendees had children who had died from illness or accidents. It was uncomfortable for her. She was already so distraught and now was being judged.

This is how the group GRASP/Unbroken No More formed. GRASP (Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing) was a small group for a few years but as the opioid epidemic has

grown, so has the group. There are many chapters all over the country. You can read all about their locations and activities at [grasphep.org](http://grasphep.org). The closest group to Surry County is in Lake Norman.

I hope this reference is helpful to you and that you will share it with others who might need the support.

Regards,  
Denise Krochta