

## WHEN A FAMILY MEMBER IS MISSING

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When a family member is missing, it can be a challenging and stressful time for their loved ones. The fate of the missing person is unknown, leaving families with feelings of worry and distress. Dealing with a missing family member is a unique experience as it involves both grief and hope for their return. Families often live with uncertainty, and many searches for their missing family members, waiting for news for a long time.

### FOR FAMILIES DEALING WITH A MISSING FAMILY MEMBER

- It is common to experience various emotions such as sadness, anger, guilt, and feeling overwhelmed at times. Grief and hope are often expressed in different cultural ways.
- It can be difficult to make decisions, adjust to a new family identity, and move on with daily life when a loved one is missing.
- Since the fate of the missing person is unknown, there are few culturally appropriate rituals that honor the missing, acknowledge a family's loss or recognize how a family can be changed by having a member missing.

### HOW MEMBERS OF A FAMILY REACT TO AMBIGUOUS LOSS VARIES

- Some family members may want to 'move on', while others feel they cannot do so until they find out what happened.
- There might be an increase in family conflicts and relationship difficulties as different members react in diverse ways to the loss.

Living in a stressful situation is not easy to experience. It is important to remember that the majority of people can live with ambiguous loss and recover. The feeling of distress may linger, but with time passing, many people adapt to it by living with the loss and investing in their present lives.

### THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS HAVE BEEN FOUND HELPFUL FOR OTHERS ADAPTING TO THE LOSS OF A FAMILY MEMBER

- Having emotional social support, talking with supportive family, friends, or groups of those having missing members about the loss and present circumstances, and being able to express and normalize emotions.
- Accepting that the disappearance is out of one's control and that adjusting to the disappearance is positive.
- Continuing with daily tasks and engaging in activities that are meaningful and joyful. Doing necessary everyday tasks can serve as a pause on repetitive negative thinking, as does physical exercise.
- Investing in and enjoying close relationships with others that are present in our lives.
- Having access to practical help and knowing where to go to find assistance, for example, for legal matters or civic forms.
- Creating rituals to remember, celebrate and honor the missing persons and key dates such as birthdays or anniversaries.

Everyone needs to know what has happened to their missing relatives. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement helps trace the missing and the Restoring Family Links network brings families together again, wherever, and whenever possible.

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