

# A Loss without a Card

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August 2023

**K-STATE** | Southwind District  
Research and Extension

I am talking about ambiguous loss which is often unclear and without closure. This type of loss is a common part of life but is often the most difficult and stressful one to deal with. I recently learned more about it while viewing a webinar by Dr. Michelle Krehbiel with the University of Nebraska who also refers to University of Minnesota Extension's *A Changing Way of Life: Ambiguous Loss and Farming* and Dr. Pauline Boss's research.



So, what is ambiguous loss? It is a loss that is confusing, uncertain, unverified, and can go on and on. It can be a physical loss such as a missing person or having to downsize the farm due to drought or disaster. It can also be psychological such as a loss of a loved one as you knew him/her due to dementia or of your own identity due to being newly retired.

We've all dealt with something that did not have an official ritual to show that a loss occurred such as: divorce, miscarriage, a financial fall out, addiction, infertility, deployment, immigration, retirement, traumatic brain injury, or a natural disaster. What do we do to not get stuck in this complicated grief? In short, build resilience to lower the stress and anxiety caused by this loss and create a new narrative that one can live with. Here's a few ways to work towards moving forward.

1. **Name what you are going through.** Acknowledge that you have had a loss and name the feelings you are going through. Also do this with other family/friends that are affected.
2. **Make new meaning of the loss.** There is no magic recipe that can do this, it will take time and a combination of answers to assist. However, reconstructing your identity within this loss may help. For example, if you struggle with retirement, you may embrace that you are now a full-time grandpa and volunteer.
3. **Normalize Ambivalence.** Work towards 'both and thinking'. It's ok to have two opposing ideas in your mind at the same time. For example, he is both gone and may return (missing in action soldier); she is both gone and still here (dementia).
4. **Discover hope.** We know this is extremely important in suicide prevention. Hope may look different for you amidst loss but look for ways to discover it.
5. **Seek information and humor.** If it's an illness learn more about what you can do, become an advocate. When dementia gets particularly trying keep that sense of humor or it truly would be overwhelmingly sad.
6. **Engage in Self Care.** Dr. Pauline Boss states that respite is essential and no one should feel guilty about taking it. Figure out what it means to you and make time for it!
7. **Evaluate and Build a Circle of Support.** Sadness is often treated with human connection. Find, engage, and check in on your 'community'. This could be faith based, friends/family, mental health providers, or support groups.

I hope to acknowledge my own and others' ambiguous losses more adequately. We can all work together for better. For more information, contact Tara Solomon-Smith, [tsolomon@ksu.edu](mailto:tsolomon@ksu.edu), or by calling 620-244-3826.