

WHAT IS GRIEF?

What is grief?

Grief is a normal response to the loss of something or someone that was important to you. It could be the loss of a loved one or a pet, the breakdown of a relationship, the diagnosis with a serious illness, the loss of a job, moving away from your support network, or any big life change that impacts you negatively.

Symptoms of grief

When you think of grief, you may be inclined to think of sadness, tears, and anger. But grief manifests differently for everyone.

Social

- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Avoiding people
- Change in faith or beliefs about the world
- Obsessing over what was lost

Physical

- Changes to appetite
- Physical pain
- Racing heart
- Nausea
- Sleeplessness
- Inability to focus

Emotional

- Confusion
- Rage
- Relief
- Helplessness
- Despair
- Denial
- Guilt
- Shame

Coping with grief

Everyone grieves differently, what works for one person might not work for another. Here are some strategies you can use to find what is best for you.

Seek comfort from others

It's normal to want to be alone when you're grieving but spending time with people who know and love you can be comforting.

- Permit yourself to leave social situations and be alone when you need to.
- Let yourself cry in front of others when you feel it's safe to do so. Try to focus on your need to express your grief rather than how it could make them feel.
- Reach out to people who have experienced something similar to you. You can connect with others who are experiencing grief on online forums such as griefline.org.au/forums.
- Help your friends and family in whatever small ways you can. This can alleviate any feelings that you're burdening people and strengthen your bonds with your support network.

Take care of your health

Remember your definition of 'looking after yourself' may change with your capacity and energy levels.

- Move your body in a way that makes sense. Even grieving bodies need to move and while you don't have to face the gym, gentle walks or at-home yoga videos can help get the endorphins flowing and increase your resilience

- Adapt your routine to your reality. You can't expect your grieving routine to be the same as your normal routine but daily hygiene, a regular sleep pattern, and making sure you're eating nutritious food every day are good ways to keep your body healthy.

- Stop using or cut back on alcohol, caffeine, cigarettes or vapes, and prescription or illicit drugs. While these things can change or hide your feelings temporarily, they can inadvertently make your grief bigger and less manageable.

- Be gentle on yourself if you make mistakes, are forgetful, or feel distracted. Your brain is trying to work through a lot of emotions, it's natural to feel overwhelmed sometimes.

Maintain a bond with what you've lost

Grief can make us feel like we need to cut off our connection with what we've lost and endure without it. We may worry about what others will think of us if we continue our bond with what is gone. But building a different type of bond can bring considerable relief to grieving people.

- Recall positive memories. Whether you've lost a loved one, a pet, a relationship, or a job, you feel grief because they were important to you and impacted you positively. Try to remember the good times that make you feel grateful for what you had.

- Visit your loved one's grave or a spot that was important to them. Continuing to honour and commemorate your lost loved one after the funeral or memorial can help you feel close to them.

- Speak to them as though they were still here. Just speaking to them, and anticipating their response, can help you feel like they're guiding you and their wisdom is still available to you.

Find ways to feel safe and empowered

When something unexpected happens it can take a while to feel safe again. Feeling on guard and full of adrenalin can make it difficult to rest, relax, and process your feelings.

- Understand your triggers and avoid them when you feel vulnerable. This can help you feel in control of yourself and your emotions.

- Remember there's no quick fix. You can't trick your body into forgetting what happened.

- Meditation and slow, measured breathing can help to regulate your body's response to stress.

- Reframe how you see yourself. The way you talk to yourself and think about your grief can affect the way you navigate it. Thinking of yourself as a survivor rather than as a victim can help you feel empowered rather than defensive.

Don't overlook your little wins

When everything feels like a challenge, you have to celebrate the small stuff. Getting out of bed, leaving the house, going for a walk, or cooking a meal are all huge achievements when you're grieving. If you can manage to get through the day, give yourself a pat on the back and chalk it up to your extraordinary inner strength, self-motivation, perseverance, or self-regulation.



