

understanding grief and loss

(it's a natural part of life)

Grief is an individual experience, it's what happens after you lose someone or something important to you. You don't have to know the person for their loss to impact you. Everyone experiences grief differently. Our culture, gender, age, past experiences of loss, and belief systems can also affect the way we grieve. So try not to compare yourself to anyone else, or get too worried about the way you grieve – everyone grieves differently.

What is grief?

Grief is a normal response to loss and it can affect many parts of our lives. Sometimes it can make the simplest task feel like climbing a mountain.

You might feel some or all of these:

- shock
- longing
- guilt
- disbelief
- anger
- abandonment
- pain
- resentment
- anxiety
- intense sadness
- regret
- worry.

The combination of any of these feelings might make it feel like you're out of control. Other times you might only feel one of these emotions, or a numbness that doesn't feel like anything at all. Sometimes these intense bursts of emotion can last for a long time, other times they can come and go quickly.

Changes to thoughts

When a big change happens in your life it can be hard not to think about it all the time. You might notice your mind wanders and you have trouble focusing.

Some people find it hard to care as much about the things they normally care about. It can feel like nothing matters compared to the loss they've experienced. Some people might think that the world doesn't make sense anymore, and they can't figure out their place in it.

Changes in your body

Our mind and body are closely connected, so it makes sense that grief can have a big impact on our bodies. You might experience:

- headaches
- body aches
- weight changes
- changes to your sleep
- changes to eating routines
- colds
- tiredness
- generally feeling sick and run down.

Changes in what you do

You might notice some big changes in the sorts of things you do or don't do. After a big loss, some people feel like doing nothing. They can have trouble finding the energy to keep up with day-to-day life. They might not want to see their family and friends, or withdraw from doing things they enjoy.

Other people find that keeping busy helps them to get through the day.

How long will this go on for?

It's hard to know how long grief will affect you because everyone's experience is different. However, it's important to know that eventually, things will get easier.

It might be helpful to think of grief like the ocean. Sometimes the power of the ocean is so strong you can feel out of control. Other times it feels manageable and you are able to drift along with the waves. The pain of grief can come in huge waves, smaller waves or sideways waves. Sometimes there might be waves you didn't see coming, and sometimes there are periods of calm between the waves.

What else should I look out for?

When you're experiencing grief, you might have trouble maintaining relationships and feeling connected to others. You might not be as patient when you're grieving, or you might find you get in conflict with people more often. This can be hard, because staying connected to others can be a really important part of getting supported while we grieve.

Grief isn't depression. But it's important to know that grief can leave you vulnerable to experiencing depression in the future. If you're not sure what's happening for you, it can be helpful to reach out for support.



During tough times, some people can turn to alcohol or other drugs to try to get through the pain. This might feel helpful at the time but it can create other problems and you might be more likely to say or do things you'll regret.

What can I do to help with my grief?

Grief, and everything that can come with it, can be really intense. If you've experienced loss there are things you can do.

Healthy habits

Doing simple things for your physical health can really help you handle the challenges of grief. Start with little goals, like fitting in some fruits and veggies and drinking enough water. Staying active and locking in good sleeping habits can also help.

Get into life

You might not feel like it but doing things can be one of the best ways to help things improve. Find something that works for you like playing or listening to music, walking, hanging out with friends, watching movies, playing sports or reading.

Take it easy on yourself

Being kind to yourself is a good idea at all times, but even more so when you're having a tough time. Remind yourself that grief hurts, it's hard and it takes time to heal. Feeling confused, overwhelmed, angry (or anything else) and having a cry is OK.

How can I get help?

If you're finding it hard to cope and/or your social, work or school life are being affected, then it's a good idea to ask for support.

Find someone you trust and let them in on what you're going through. If you're feeling up to it, let them know what you need from them. Maybe you just need them to listen, or maybe you need a distraction to get you through tough days.

If you want professional support, you have lots of options. You can:

- contact Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800) or Lifeline (13 11 14)
- check in with your local GP (general practitioner).



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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