

A GENTLE GRIEF RESOURCE

When a Wave of Grief Hits

Simple ways to steady yourself without pushing grief away

Grief does not follow a timetable. Take what feels helpful, leave what does not, and return whenever you need to.

Pause and name what is happening

Try saying: 'This is a wave of grief. I do not have to fight it, and it will change.' Naming the experience can reduce the fear that something is wrong. If words are difficult, place a hand over your heart or hold something comforting as a physical reminder of safety.

Return to the present

Notice five things you can see, four you can feel, three you can hear, two you can smell and one you can taste. Use only the senses that feel comfortable. Grounding is not meant to erase grief; it helps you stay alongside the feeling without being completely swept away.

Make the next ten minutes smaller

Loosen tight clothing, sit somewhere supported, sip water and slow your exhale. Postpone non-urgent decisions. If you are at work or in public, step outside, visit a quiet space or send a brief message saying you need a few minutes.

Choose connection or privacy

Some waves need company and some need solitude. Ask yourself: do I need someone to listen, help me with something practical, distract me gently, or give me space? Clear requests make it easier for others to support you.

Create a wave plan

Keep a short note on your phone with three people you can contact, two grounding activities, one safe place and any practical instructions you may forget when overwhelmed. If grief brings thoughts of harming yourself or feeling unable to stay safe, seek urgent support from emergency or crisis services.

Notice the earliest signs

A tight jaw, racing thoughts, sudden irritability, a hollow stomach, tears, silence or an urge to escape may be early signs. Recognising them gives you a small window to move somewhere safer and reduce demands before the feeling becomes overwhelming.

Use rhythm without forcing calm

Let the out-breath be slightly longer than the in-breath. If focusing on breathing makes you anxious, tap your fingers, rock gently, walk slowly or listen to a steady sound. Regulation should fit you; there is no single correct technique.

Words to send someone safe

Keep a message such as: 'A grief wave has hit me. I do not need you to fix it, but could you stay in contact?' Prepared words reduce the pressure to explain when language is difficult.

What not to demand

Do not require yourself to understand the trigger, stop crying, look composed, comfort everybody else or make important decisions immediately. A wave is a time for safety and steadiness. Meaning can be explored later.

Your personal wave card

Record your early signs, helpful sensory items, safe people, calming places, health needs and one sentence you want to remember. Keep it on your phone or in your wallet and review it on a steadier day.

A five-minute steadiness sequence

First, stop and place both feet or another part of your body against a supportive surface. Second, look around and name where you are and what day it is. Third, soften one area of tension. Fourth, take a drink or use a familiar sensory item. Fifth, decide whether you need company, privacy or practical help. Move slowly through the sequence.

Grief waves in public or at work

If you can, move to a quieter place and use a prepared phrase such as, "I need a short wellbeing break." Focus only on the next essential task and postpone explanations. A trusted colleague may help protect your space. Afterwards, consider whether temporary adjustments would make future waves safer and less exposing.

When crying will not come

A wave does not always produce tears. You may freeze, become unusually practical, laugh nervously or feel detached. The absence of crying is not evidence that you are avoiding grief. Let your response be what it is. Warmth, movement, music, writing or quiet company may help feelings move without forcing them.

Helping someone through a wave

Stay calm, reduce questions and ask permission before touching. Offer simple choices: quiet or talking, water or tea, sitting here or moving elsewhere. Do not demand eye contact or an explanation. If the person is disoriented, gently remind them where they are. Remain nearby until they feel steadier or appropriate help arrives.

Aftercare and recovery

A strong wave can leave you exhausted, headachy or emotionally tender. Reduce stimulation, eat and drink what is manageable, and avoid judging what happened. If possible, note the trigger, early signs and useful support. Recovery is part of responding to the wave; it is not an optional reward after you have carried on.

A gentle reminder

You do not have to carry grief perfectly. If you are struggling to manage daily life, feel persistently unsafe, or need more support than friends and family can give, speak with your GP, a bereavement service or an appropriately qualified mental health professional. In an emergency, contact emergency services.

Until next time, give yourself space to breathe.