



Grief Myths

Ten compassionate truths about loss, love and living with grief

Grief is universal, but it is never identical. Myths about how we “should” grieve can create shame, pressure and loneliness at a time when we most need understanding. This resource gently challenges ten common beliefs and offers space for a more personal, human experience of loss.

There is no single map for grief. Take what supports you and leave what does not.

Myth 1: There is a right way to grieve

Reality: Grief has no single correct shape. One person may cry often; another may feel numb, restless, practical, angry or quiet. Culture, faith, personality, neurodivergence, relationships and circumstances all influence how loss is experienced.

A gentler truth: Let your response be yours. What helps today may be different tomorrow, and neither response makes your grief more or less real.

Myth 2: Only bereavement causes grief

Reality: We can grieve a person, a pet, a pregnancy, a relationship, a home, a job, health, fertility, independence, identity, safety or the future we expected. Some losses are not recognised by other people, but they can still be profound.

A gentler truth: You do not need permission to name something as a loss. Recognising it can be the beginning of caring for yourself.

Myth 3: Everyone needs therapy to recover

Reality: Grief is a human response, not automatically an illness. Many people find enough support through family, friends, community, faith, rituals or time. Others benefit greatly from counselling or specialist support, particularly when grief feels stuck, traumatic or overwhelming.

A gentler truth: Seeking therapy is not failure, and not needing therapy is not avoidance. Support should fit the person.

Myth 4: It is kinder not to mention the loss

Reality: Silence can sometimes leave a grieving person feeling that their loss, or the person who died, has been forgotten. A gentle acknowledgement often matters more than finding perfect words.

A gentler truth: Try: "I have been thinking about you," or "I remember them too." Follow the person's lead and allow them to change the subject.

Myth 5: Grief should finish within a set time

Reality: There is no fixed timetable. The intensity often changes, but grief may return around anniversaries, birthdays, family changes, familiar places or moments when we long to share news. This does not mean someone has gone backwards.

A gentler truth: The aim is not to erase the bond or the loss. It is to find ways to carry it while continuing to live.

Myth 6: Grief happens in neat stages

Reality: Stage models can offer language for some experiences, but they are not a compulsory route or checklist. Feelings may overlap, repeat, arrive in a different order or not appear at all.

A gentler truth: Use a model only if it helps you understand yourself. You are not grieving incorrectly if your experience does not fit it.

Myth 7: Everybody grieves in the same way

Reality: Grief is shaped by culture, religion, family expectations, age, disability, communication style and past experience. Even people grieving the same loss may need very different things.

A gentler truth: Difference does not equal indifference. A person who returns to routine quickly may be grieving just as deeply as someone who withdraws.

Myth 8: Grief is only intense sadness

Reality: Grief can include longing, anger, guilt, relief, fear, confusion, numbness, physical pain, exhaustion and moments of humour or joy. Conflicting feelings can exist together, especially after a complicated relationship or a long illness.

A gentler truth: Feeling relief or happiness does not cancel love. Emotions are information, not a moral verdict.

Myth 9: Moving forward betrays the person who died

Reality: Laughing again, making plans, loving someone, changing routines or enjoying life does not mean forgetting. Many people continue a bond through memories, values, traditions, objects, stories or acts of kindness.

A gentler truth: Moving forward is not the same as moving on. Love can remain while life grows around the loss.

Myth 10: Advice is the best way to help

Reality: Grief cannot usually be fixed with instructions. Unasked-for advice can make someone feel judged or rushed, even when it is kindly meant. Presence, practical help and patient listening are often more supportive.

A gentler truth: Ask: "Would you like me to listen, help with something practical, or give you some space?" Then respect the answer.

Supporting someone who is grieving

Stay present. You do not need to remove the pain. Listen without comparing their loss or searching for a positive lesson.

Be specific. Instead of saying "Let me know if you need anything," offer one manageable action such as bringing food, walking the dog or sending a message next week.

Keep remembering. Support often becomes quieter after the funeral or immediate crisis. Birthdays, anniversaries and ordinary days can all feel significant.

Respect difference. Some people need conversation; others need company without words, practical help or time alone.

A gentle reflection

What have you been told grief should look like? Which expectation feels heavy or unhelpful? What would it be like to replace that expectation with: "My grief is allowed to be personal, changing and real"? You may wish to write, draw, talk, create a small ritual or simply notice what your body needs today.

When extra support may help

Consider speaking with a GP, counsellor or bereavement service if grief feels unbearable, remains intensely disabling, brings persistent hopelessness, or you are worried about your safety. Urgent help is important if you feel at risk of harming yourself. Support is not about rushing grief; it is about helping you feel less alone while you carry it.

This resource offers general emotional wellbeing information and is not a diagnosis or replacement for individual medical or therapeutic care.