

What Is Grief? Understanding Loss and Bereavement

Understanding the different forms and experiences of grief

Understanding this form of grief

Grief is the response we have when something or someone meaningful is lost. Although it is most often associated with death, grief can also follow relationship breakdown, illness, disability, estrangement, loss of work, identity, home, community or an expected future.

There is no requirement to experience grief in a particular order or to reach a particular emotional milestone. What matters is understanding your own response, noticing what support is useful and allowing the significance of the loss to be recognised.

How it can feel

Grief can affect emotions, thoughts, the body, relationships and everyday functioning. Sadness may be present, but so can anger, guilt, anxiety, numbness, relief, confusion and even moments of enjoyment. These responses can sit alongside one another.

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Why this grief can be difficult

There is no universal timetable. Grief often changes rather than simply disappearing. A useful way of understanding this is that life can gradually grow around grief, allowing the loss to remain meaningful without occupying every moment.

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What may help

Grief does not need to follow five stages in order. People may recognise some of the feelings described in stage models, but they can appear in different orders, repeat, overlap or not appear at all.

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Emotional and physical effects

Grief can affect sleep, appetite, energy, concentration, memory, digestion, muscle tension and anxiety as well as mood. New, severe, persistent or worrying physical symptoms should be medically checked rather than automatically attributed to grief.

Supporting yourself

Keep expectations realistic. Simple food, drinks, rest, daylight, manageable movement, written reminders and practical help can reduce pressure. Connection can help, but time alone can also be important. There is no single coping strategy that suits everybody.

Therapy and additional support

Not everyone needs counselling. Person-centred or bereavement counselling can provide a place to talk without being hurried. A GP can help if grief, depression, anxiety, trauma symptoms or physical problems are substantially affecting daily life. Where a death was traumatic, trauma-focused work should be undertaken with an appropriately qualified practitioner when suitable.

A Message From Me

Grief is not a test you have to pass. Different losses create different experiences, and two people can live through the same event and grieve in completely different ways. I hope this guide helps you put words around what you are carrying and reminds you that you do not have to force your grief into somebody else's timetable.

Books and places for support

Grief Works - Julia Samuel

The Grieving Brain - Mary-Frances O'Connor

It's OK That You're Not OK - Megan Devine

The Plain Guide to Grief - John Wilson

Cruse Bereavement Support

NHS grief, bereavement and loss information

Samaritans: 116 123

Space to Breathe Therapy - Support Hub

With warmth,

Maggie

Space to Breathe Therapy