

Disenfranchised Grief - When Your Loss Is Not Recognised

Understanding the different forms and experiences of grief

Understanding this form of grief

Disenfranchised grief is a useful term for grief that is minimised, hidden or not fully recognised by other people or society. The relationship or loss may not fit conventional expectations about who is 'allowed' to grieve.

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

This can happen after the death of an ex-partner, friend, colleague, pet, pregnancy loss, secret relationship or other loss that receives little acknowledgement. Cultural or family expectations can also make grief harder to express.

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Why this grief can be difficult

When grief is not recognised, people may feel pressure to stay quiet or return to normal quickly. This can add isolation to an already painful experience.

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What may help

Finding even one person, community or therapist who recognises the significance of the loss can help create space for grief without requiring it to be justified.

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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