

Grief After Non-Death Losses - Relationships, Health, Work and Identity

Understanding the different forms and experiences of grief

Understanding this form of grief

The NHS recognises that grief and loss can follow experiences other than death, including relationship endings, job loss, moving home and serious illness. A person may be grieving a role, identity, ability, community or 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

These losses can change everyday life profoundly. Someone may miss who they were before illness, the security of a career, a shared future after divorce or a community left behind after moving.

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Why this grief can be difficult

Because there may be no public ritual around these changes, people sometimes minimise their own grief. Naming the loss can help make sense of why emotions are so strong.

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What may help

Adjustment does not require pretending the loss did not matter. It can involve building a changed life while acknowledging what has been lost.

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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