

When Your Brain Feels Full

Understanding grief, brain fog, concentration and decision fatigue

Understanding what may be happening

Grief can occupy a remarkable amount of mental space. Attention may be pulled towards memories, practical responsibilities, unanswered questions, worries about other people and the reality of what has changed. Even when you are not consciously thinking about the loss, part of your mind may still be processing it.

This can make concentration feel unreliable. You might reread the same paragraph, forget why you walked into a room, lose track of conversations, misplace things or feel unable to make decisions that would normally be straightforward.

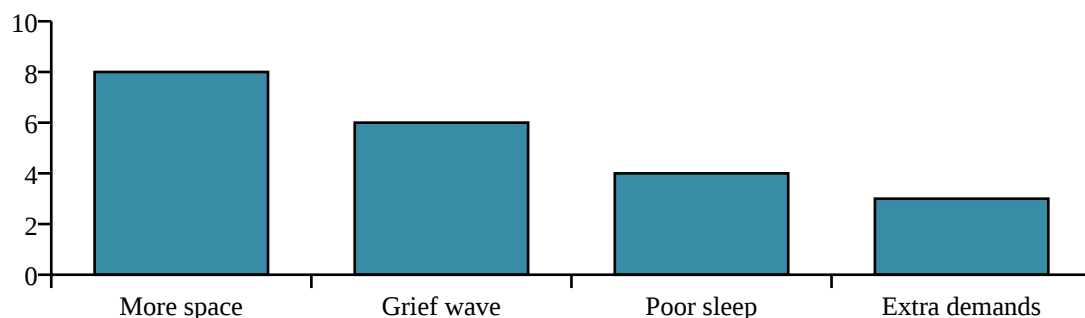
A coaching approach is not about forcing your brain to work at its old pace. It is about reducing unnecessary load, externalising information and helping you distinguish between what genuinely needs your attention and what can wait.

Common experiences

- Forgetting appointments or everyday tasks
- Finding emails or paperwork unusually difficult
- Feeling overwhelmed by too many choices
- Starting several things but finishing none
- Needing longer to process information
- Feeling embarrassed or frightened by memory lapses

A useful way to think about capacity

Illustrative coaching scale - not measured clinical data



This graph is an illustrative coaching tool rather than a clinical measurement. It shows how available capacity can reduce when several demands overlap. The purpose is to help you plan from the capacity you actually have, not the capacity you think you should have.

What can make this harder

Can add pressure	May be more supportive
• Trying to keep everything in your head • Multitasking • Making several major decisions while exhausted • Using your pre-loss productivity as the standard • Assuming every lapse means something is seriously wrong	• Write information down immediately • Use one short priority list • Make one decision at a time • Reduce non-essential choices • Ask someone trusted to help organise information • Work at the time of day your concentration is strongest

A worked coaching example

Instead of writing 'sort the finances', break it into visible steps: find the letter, put it on the table, read page one, highlight the action needed, and decide whether help is required.

Try the STOP - SORT - SUPPORT method

STOP	SORT	SUPPORT
Pause long enough to notice what is actually happening rather than immediately pushing through.	Separate what needs action now, what can wait and what is an emotion rather than a task.	Choose one form of support: rest, a reminder, company, practical help, a professional conversation or a boundary.

Reflection & coaching questions

Use these gently. You do not need to answer them all. One useful answer is enough for a session or a difficult day.

- What is taking up most of my mental space today?
- Which decision can wait until another day?
- What can I move from my head onto paper or a calendar?
- Who could help me organise information without taking control away from me?
- When is my concentration usually best?

My personal check-in

What I notice	What I need	My smallest next step

A one-week experiment

Choose one adjustment from this guide and try it for seven days. Keep the experiment deliberately small. At the end of the week, ask: Did this reduce pressure? Did it make something easier to begin? Did it protect energy? If it did not help, that is useful information too - choose a different adjustment rather than treating it as failure.

Books & further resources

Books can offer language, companionship and different ways of understanding grief. You do not need to read them from beginning to end. A chapter or a few pages may be enough.

- **The Grieving Brain** - Mary-Frances O'Connor
- **Grief Works** - Julia Samuel
- **It's OK That You're Not OK** - Megan Devine

Further support

Cruse Bereavement Support offers bereavement information and support. **NHS** guidance includes information on grief after bereavement and other significant losses. **Samaritans** provides confidential emotional support on 116 123, day or night.

When extra support may be useful

Consider speaking with a GP, therapist, bereavement service or another appropriate professional if grief is having a persistent or severe effect on daily life, if anxiety or low mood is becoming difficult to manage, if physical symptoms concern you, or if you feel unable to stay safe. In an immediate emergency, seek urgent help.

A final coaching thought

The aim is not to make grief small. It is to make the demands around grief more manageable, so you have a little more room to live alongside what has happened.