

When Grief Hits in Waves

Understanding sudden surges of grief and unexpected reminders

Understanding what may be happening

Grief is rarely experienced at one steady level. A person can have a relatively manageable morning and then be overwhelmed by a song, photograph, smell, date, place, conversation or quiet moment.

Some triggers are obvious, while others are subtle. The brain can connect an ordinary detail with a person, place or period of life before you have consciously noticed the connection.

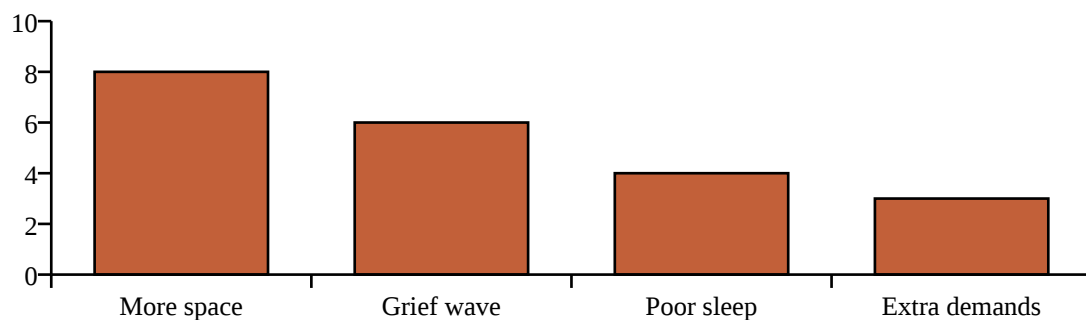
A strong wave does not erase the steadier moments that came before it. Coaching can help you prepare for predictable triggers, create an exit plan and identify ways to reconnect with the present when a wave arrives.

Common experiences

- Sudden tears after an ordinary moment
- Feeling okay in company and overwhelmed afterwards
- Strong reactions to anniversaries or familiar places
- Feeling that grief has 'come back'
- Fear of being caught off guard in public
- Avoiding reminders because the reaction feels too powerful

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
• Treating the wave as failure • Trying to suppress every reminder • Overloading significant dates • Expecting yourself to explain the emotion at its peak • Making yourself stay in a situation that has become too much	• Name the wave without judging it • Ground through sight, sound and touch • Leave extra space around difficult dates • Tell trusted people what may be hard • Keep an exit plan for social situations • Reduce demands after a powerful wave

A worked coaching example

You see something in a supermarket that the person used to buy. Instead of forcing yourself through the reaction, step aside, feel your feet on the floor, decide whether to continue or leave, and make the rest of the day lighter.

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.

- Which reminders tend to bring grief closer?
- How do I know a wave is starting in my body?
- What helps me feel anchored?
- What permission do I need on significant dates?
- Who can I contact when I need company without needing conversation?

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.

- **Grief Works** - Julia Samuel
- **Bearing the Unbearable** - Joanne Cacciatore
- **Finding Meaning** - David Kessler

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.