

The Exhaustion of Grief

Why grief can leave the body and mind profoundly depleted

Understanding what may be happening

Grief can be exhausting because the body and mind are adapting while everyday life continues. Sleep may be disrupted, appetite may change, muscles may remain tense and ordinary responsibilities still need attention.

Tiredness may not disappear after one good night's sleep. Emotional strain, social contact, paperwork, travel and caring for others can all use capacity that is already reduced.

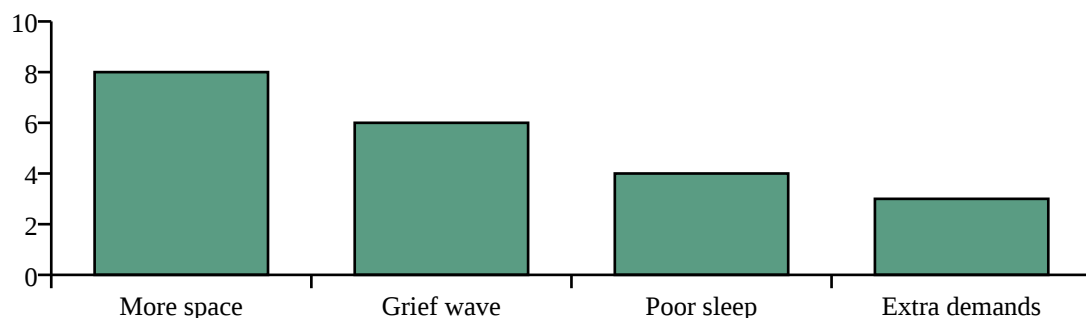
A helpful coaching shift is from 'How do I get back to full capacity?' to 'How do I use the capacity I actually have today?' This can reduce guilt and make priorities more realistic.

Common experiences

- Waking tired despite enough time in bed
- Needing rest after social contact
- Feeling physically heavy or slowed down
- Less patience for noise or conversation
- Cancelling plans because energy disappears
- Feeling guilty about resting

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
• Overbooking good days • Treating rest as something to earn • Skipping meals or fluids • Agreeing to plans out of guilt • Expecting your previous energy immediately	• Plan recovery time after demanding activities • Use must/useful/can-wait priorities • Keep food and fluids easy to access • Take short rests before exhaustion peaks • Reduce unnecessary errands • Explain fluctuating energy to people close to you

A worked coaching example

If you have three errands, two phone calls and a social commitment, ask which one is essential, which can be shortened and which can move. Protecting energy is not the same as giving up.

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.

- Where am I expecting my old energy from myself?
- What can be simplified or delegated?
- Which activities drain me most?
- What actually restores me rather than only distracting me?
- What would a lower-demand day look like?

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.

- **An Introduction to Coping with Grief - Sue Morris**
- **The Grieving Brain - Mary-Frances O'Connor**
- **Resilient Grieving - Lucy Hone**

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.