

When Ordinary Tasks Feel Enormous

Why everyday jobs can become difficult during grief

Understanding what may be happening

Shopping, cooking, emails and paperwork look simple from the outside, but each contains many hidden steps: starting, sequencing, deciding, remembering, switching attention and completing.

When grief has reduced mental and physical capacity, those hidden steps can become much more visible. A task can feel enormous because the brain is trying to hold too many instructions at once.

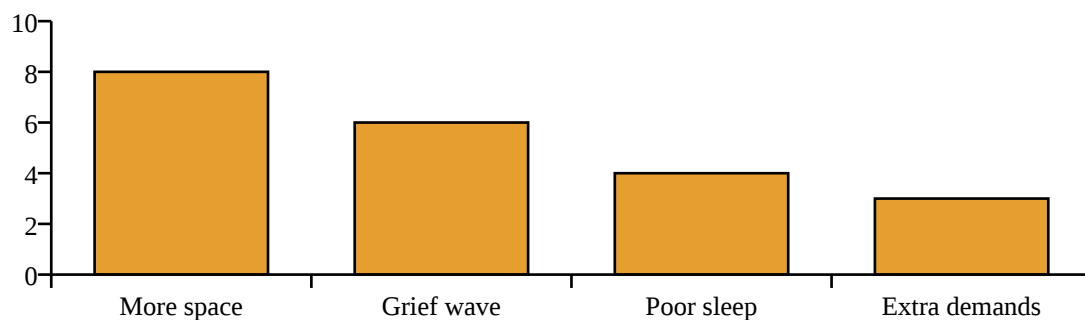
Coaching can help by making the next step smaller and more concrete rather than waiting for motivation to return.

Common experiences

- Unread emails piling up
- Avoiding forms or bills
- Struggling to plan meals
- Leaving jobs half-finished
- Feeling ashamed about household tasks
- Putting off phone calls

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
• Writing vague tasks such as 'sort everything' • Creating very long to-do lists • Waiting to feel motivated • Trying to complete several difficult tasks on the same day	• Write the first visible action • Use three-item lists • Set a 10-minute start point • Body-double with someone trusted • Use templates and reminders • Stop after a defined amount rather than after everything is finished

A worked coaching example

Instead of 'deal with emails', write: open inbox, find the most urgent message, read it, decide reply/delegate/wait, then stop. Success is completing the chosen step, not clearing the whole inbox.

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 ordinary task feels disproportionately difficult?
- What is its first visible step?
- Can I make the task take ten minutes rather than an hour?
- Could somebody sit alongside me while I begin?
- What can safely remain unfinished today?

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
- **Option B** - Sheryl Sandberg & Adam Grant

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.