

# What is grief?



**Grief is intense sadness. It's our response to a loss and about coming to terms with what has changed in our lives.**

Feelings of grief can be about many things; the loss of a loved one, friend, relationship, pet, possessions or even loss of lifestyle or living arrangements.

Grieving is an individual process- everybody grieves differently and for different time periods. Provided you are not causing harm to yourself or others around you, there is no 'right' way to grieve. In families, it's important to respect a person's way of grieving even if it's different to yours.

During grief people may feel shock, numbness, intense sadness, anger, guilt, resentment, relief, panic and fear. Feelings tend to come in waves and can be quite unexpected.

In the beginning, the waves of feelings might feel really overwhelming. It's not unusual for others to feel numb like they have no feelings at all.

Grief can also cause physical symptoms like disruptions to your appetite or sleeping patterns, headaches or nausea. It can affect some people's thinking or ability to concentrate. Grief can also interrupt our usual routine and you might find that you get sick more often.

### Will things ever get better?

The good news is that most people find that these waves of grief gradually happen less often and are less intense. This doesn't mean you're forgetting why or who for you were grieving. It's a sign that you're beginning to learn to live with the loss. It's also okay to still have fun and laugh during a period of grief.

It is not unusual to unexpectedly be upset by the loss many years after the 'event'. This is more likely to happen around the anniversary of the loss. Keep in mind that like the other waves of grief, these two will most likely settle down.

Events that can create grief and loss include:

- when someone you love dies
- when someone you love gets diagnosed with a serious or terminal illness or disability
- when your parents separate or divorce
- when there is a natural disaster in your community
- when your pet dies
- when you have to move school, your house, city or country
- when you break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend.

### Complicated grief

Complicated grief refers to factors that get in the way of a usual grieving process. Such factors might include the kind of relationship a grieving person might have had with a family member or the issue that has created a grief response. People who are experiencing complicated grief usually can't grieve in the usual way because there are strong feelings of shame or the issues that have caused the grief are difficult to talk about in everyday conversation.

Examples of complicated grief include:

- when a parent or family member suffers from a mental illness and has to be hospitalised
- when a relationship with a parent or family member changes because the parent or family member uses drugs or alcohol excessively
- when a relationship with a close family member changes because a young person has disclosed child abuse or family violence. In this case, a young person might grieve the family that they have had or could have had. It's okay for a young person to grieve both their relationship with whole family and with the family member who has perpetrated abuse against them or family members.



## So how can you cope with grief?

1. Take the time to grieve. Accept that you'll need time to grieve and take each day as it comes. Don't think too far ahead about your grieving.
2. Do things you like doing and be around people who you feel comfortable being with
3. Accept your feelings. What you're feeling is normal. Let yourself feel your feelings. If it helps, write things down.
4. Ceremonies, rituals, memorials or remembrance meals or events are important. These special events allow you to share your memories, stories and feelings with people who care for you. It is also a marker for a new phase in your life
5. Reach out to people you trust. Express your feelings to people who know and care for you.
6. Keep active. If you regularly exercise, try and keep your usual routine. If you're not someone who regularly exercises, consider starting? It could just be a walk around the park to the shops. Evidence now points to exercise being a protective factor for grief and loss and feelings of depression and anxiety.
7. Try to keep your usual routine. Get up at your usual time and go to bed at your usual time. Keep going to school or work.
8. If you're worried about getting stuck in your feelings, then seek help.

## Need more help?

Remember that you don't have to deal with things on your own, and help is available.

Deciding to get help is a sometimes tough but brave first step in dealing with grief and loss. You can start by talking to a trusted adult such as a parent, carer, family member, teacher or school counsellor and telling them how you're feeling.

If any of the information we've talked about here has concerned you, or you'd like to chat to someone about what's going on for you, help is available. Visit [www.connectedspace.com.au/need-help-now](http://www.connectedspace.com.au/need-help-now) or call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800.



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