



Grief and Grieving Guide

Guide to Handling Grief When Losing a Loved One

There isn't an easy way, and each death asks something different of us.

Grief is a part of life. Something that happens to varying degrees almost every day. We can feel grief, loss, sadness for the smallest of things, and it is not limited to the death of a loved one, losing a pet or a person.

Grief, by definition, is a wave, a single point in time, whereas grieving is the process, the emotion of grief that can be felt at any time when we become aware of loss. Healthy grieving is the experience of moments of grief that change over time, becoming less frequent and less intense, and more familiar. We learn how to include the memory and moments of grief in our lives as a part of us. Integrating aspects of life and emotions with a level of acceptance and allowance for this part also shapes who we are.



**Our Brain is Physically Changed
by our Loves.**

We create memories, meanings, emotions attached to them, and stories with others. Each experience rewires our brains, so over time, repeated experiences physically rewire our brains differently than they were before we engaged with this love.

It makes sense, then, that when a love leaves, the brain seeks the usual connections, experiences, and firing of neural pathways to maintain them. This is normal, and without the person of love to stimulate the senses, we rely on our memories. Not the same, and so a new set of emotions are felt – loss, sadness, and aloneness in the journey.

1. Understanding Grief

Grief is a natural response to loss. It encompasses a wide range of emotions, including sadness, anger, guilt, and confusion. Recognising that grieving is a process and allowing yourself to experience these emotions is crucial for healing. There is no time frame, order or sense to the process, but it is a journey to flow with, like a river.

Grief, and grieving, isn't limited to the death of a loved one, but encompasses events, milestones, expectations, goals, hopes, and dreams.

- Think about relationships, career, study goals and travel.
- Loss from damage to a home, car or other items that hold meaning or specialness.
- Changes in life stages, giving up the pleasures of being single when becoming coupled, and vice versa. Children not arriving, leaving home, or coming back even.
- Disappointments and not being able to help, rescue or prevent harm for others, through addictions, disease, violence, or losses in their life.
- Not sharing special days, such as holidays, birthdays, or other celebrations, with the people we want there.

There are so many different scenarios that can trigger grief, and the grief cascade.

New experiences and loss can trigger unprocessed grief from previous losses. If there are a few, then you may experience compound grief.

Grief can also be anticipatory, which could be seen as grieving with worry. As you imagine the future and consider scenarios that include possible losses or significant changes in circumstances, they can evoke feelings of grief. For example, when we envisage

- children growing up and moving out of home,
- hearing a frightening diagnosis,
- dropping or significantly changing plans we really wanted to pursue,
- moving away from home, location, friends, and family.



Grieving is a form of learning

- Understanding grief starts with appreciating the type of bonding and attachment you have with the loved one.
- Grieving takes time because the brain has conflicting information from memories, emotional responses to memories and the current 'reality' of them not being around anymore.

- Avoidance gets in the way of learning how life is now. Rumination – thinking about what was, what could have been or done differently, can be a form of avoidance

Perhaps instead of, "How are you doing?"...

We might ask...

"What has changed since your loss? What are you learning?"

2. Acknowledge Your Feelings – it is normal to have big emotions and have a physical change due to grief and grieving. It is exhausting, and the only thing you can do is rest your nervous system and create space to just be.

- Allow Yourself to Grieve: Acceptance begins by giving yourself permission to feel your emotions. Permit yourself to grieve in your own way and at your own time.
- Express Your Emotions: Cry if you need to. It's a healthy way to release pent-up feelings. You might be inspired to be physically active. Build or break things. Rearrange the future, or pack up and leave. Be more active, proactive and distracted. There will be a time, though, when the emotions will refuse to be ignored, and you will know when these moments are. Supporting yourself in grieving means giving space, permission, and allowance for the waves of emotions to come and go. At times like a crashing tsunami, others like a fog or strong breeze that takes a moment or many to become re-orientated.
- Acknowledge the gap and voids in reality as your brain catches up with the new information – they, in the sensory way, are not here anymore. The gaps in sensory information and memory files are loneliness, sadness, emptiness, etc. There is now a gap or void in the brain's wiring between what was, and the pathways of current feeding sensory information for that person's 'file'.

3. Seek Support

- Talk to Someone: Share your feelings with trusted friends, family members, or a counsellor. Talking about your emotions and memories can provide comfort and help make sense of what you are feeling. Over time, talking about them can change tone as you adjust and learn to include their memories in the now.
- It also helps to gently rewire the memories into softer ones, less jagged with pain and more with lighter emotions.
- Join Support Groups: Consider joining a grief support group where you can connect with others who understand what you're going through.

Download the [Gather My Crew app](#) and accept real help with the mundane and overwhelming tasks that feel like too much. Asking others for help can be a gift to them as well, giving them something positive to be part of and share their love with you when they can't in other ways.



4. Take Care of Your Physical Health. Grief is exhausting.

- Eat Well: Maintain a balanced diet to keep your body healthy.
- Exercise: Physical activity can help reduce stress and improve your mood. Stretching, light exercise, or hardcore can move big emotions faster. Listen to what your body needs and how you like to move.
- Rest: Ensure you get enough sleep. Grief can be exhausting, both mentally and physically.
- Learn coping skills and somatic healing to help integrate the past, present and projects. As part of healing emotions and adjusting to the current reality.

5. Create a Routine

- Establishing a daily routine can provide a sense of normalcy and control. It helps to structure your day and keeps you engaged. Tick box, or accountability of the most critical things to be done. Eat something healthy, drink water, take the kids to school,
- Ask friends to help you by prompting or sharing what needs to be done.

6. Memorialise Your Loved One

- Create a Tribute: Consider creating a memorial, such as a photo album or a memory box, to honour and remember your loved one.
- Participate in Rituals: Engage in rituals or activities meaningful to the deceased, such as lighting a candle, visiting a favourite spot, or participating in their favourite hobbies.
- Celebrate milestones as if they are there.
- Wear jewellery or other memory pieces such as a badge, scarf, colour, perfume.
- Carry tokens such as a key ring, favourite headphones, a tailsman, photos, messages, toys, etc.

7. Allow Yourself to Enjoy Life

- It's okay to find moments of joy and laughter. Engaging in activities that bring you happiness does not diminish your love for the deceased.
- Giving yourself permission and seeing that it is ok and normal to have both sides of the emotional spectrum at the same time. Happiness and sadness, for instance. The

fullness of having friends and family, and the void of not having that one person.

8. Be Patient with Yourself

- Grief doesn't follow a set timeline. Some days will be harder than others, and that's okay. Be kind and patient with yourself as you navigate through your grief journey. They talk about the year of firsts. For some, it can be the years of firsts as children grow; and other milestones are experienced that they missed out on.

9. Seek Professional Help If Needed

- Counselling: A professional counsellor or therapist can provide tools and strategies to cope with your grief. They can bear witness to your struggles and help you make sense of what you are feeling and why.
- Help you with strategies or ways to put things into perspective that make sense for you, and are easier to live with. Journal prompts, art therapy, mindfulness, visualisations etc.
- Role play or talk through what you feel or need to say in the moment, such as with anger, frustration, hurts, sadness, or seeking forgiveness.
- Teach you techniques for interruption and rewiring, such as Tapping, Somatic Therapy, and EMDR, to name a few.
- Medication: In some cases, medication may be prescribed to help manage symptoms of severe depression or anxiety.

10. Celebrate Their Life

- Anniversaries and Special Dates: Acknowledge birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays by doing something special to honour your loved one.
- Share Stories: Keep their memory alive by sharing stories and experiences with others.

11. Accept That Grief Changes Over Time

Grief evolves. Initially, it may be intense and all-consuming, but it becomes more manageable over time. Allow yourself to adapt and grow through the grieving process.

12. Find Meaning

Finding meaning in your loss can help in the healing process. This might involve dedicating time to causes your loved one cared about, volunteering, or engaging in acts of kindness in their memory. Awareness building, fundraising, supporting others going through similar situations, for yourself and what is right for you. What brings you joy and purpose back into your life.

Conclusion

Handling grief is a profoundly personal journey. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and finding what works best for you is important. Allow yourself to experience the full range of emotions, seek support when needed, and remember that it's okay to find joy and meaning as you move forward.



Honouring Life Education

A space to access, learn, and be supported as you navigate the palliative and end-of-life phases, for yourself, or another.

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