

Grief & Loss



What is grief?

Grief is a natural reaction to loss. Grief is both a universal and a highly personal experience. Our experiences of grief will be determined by a variety of factors including the type of loss experienced, our coping mechanisms, our support network, our previous experiences of loss and our cultural and spiritual beliefs. Some examples of loss include the death of a loved one, the ending of an important relationship, job loss, loss through natural disasters or the loss of independence through disability or illness.

Common experiences when grieving:

- not feeling yourself
- changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- physical pain
- difficulty concentrating and remembering things
- preoccupation with the deceased or the circumstances of their death
- apathy or lack of enjoyment in normal activities
- withdrawal from others
- conflict in personal relationships
- thoughts of suicide or self-harm
- reliance on negative coping strategies including alcohol and drugs.

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Typical Reactions to Loss

The following are some of the emotions you may experience whilst grieving. You will not necessarily experience all of these emotions and you may find that you experience waves of emotion that come and go at various times. The first few days following the death of a loved one or other types of loss will be particularly intense.

Common emotional responses:

- emptiness or feeling numb and devoid of emotion
- disbelief that the person has died
- confusion
- intense sorrow and sadness
- yearning or longing for the deceased
- anger at ourselves or others
- relief
- guilt or shame
- exhaustion
- loneliness and isolation
- feeling that life is meaningless without the deceased
- overwhelmed at having to cope
- anxiety about the future
- moments of happiness

Grieving is a normal process in the face of loss. Grief is not a linear or formulated process that you “pass through” in a set way, there is no right or wrong way to grieve. It is important to acknowledge that grief and loss can bring forth complicated and conflicting emotions. If your grief persists for an extended period and prevents you from returning to normal activities, it is important to talk to someone about your feelings.


The sudden loss of a loved one, relationship or job may trigger suicidal thoughts and feelings. If this happens, make sure you talk it over with a trusted person, contact a support service or get help from a professional such as your GP.



How to manage feelings around grief and loss

People grieve and cope with loss in their own individual way. Consider the following:

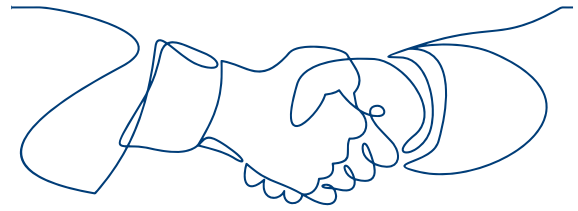
- Allow yourself to grieve — create time and space to experience the range of emotions that come following a loss. It is important to be able to identify and acknowledge the emotions you are experiencing. You may find it helpful to write down what you are thinking and feeling. There is no right or wrong, simply your own experience. You may find it helpful to talk with a close friend or family member about your experience. Someone you can trust and rely on to listen to you.
 - Take care of yourself—eat well, hydrate, exercise and get plenty of sleep. Try to maintain normal routines wherever possible. Initially you may consider taking time out from work and study commitments to lessen the stress on you at this time.
- Do not place unrealistic expectations on yourself and avoid making big decisions.
- Accept help from others — let family and friends know what they can do to help. Consider talking to a health professional or joining a support group to share your experience and listen to the experience of others in a similar situation.
 - Avoid negative coping strategies and avoidance techniques—you may find in the short-term that it is easier to use substances such as alcohol and drugs as the experience of intense pain and sadness is reduced temporarily. However, these avoidance strategies only delay the grieving process and have a negative impact on our emotional and physical well-being. Identify other healthy coping strategies such as exercise or meditation to bring some relief.
 - Prepare for stressful events—birthdays and other special occasions or certain places may elicit a strong emotional response. Be aware of this and identify what you can do to cope. Plan an activity or engage in a ritual at this time to remember and acknowledge the loss. Allow yourself to celebrate the happy memories you have.



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Where to go for support

Seeking help is a positive sign at this time. There are numerous support options available to you if you need to speak to someone about your experience of grief and loss.



Below are some of the places to go for information and support:

- Contact **Lifeline: 13 11 14**, text on **0477 13 11 14** or web chat at **www.lifeline.org.au/gethelp** (all available 24/7)
- **Mensline Australia: 1300 78 99 78** (24hrs)
- **Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800**
- **Beyondblue: 1300 22 46 36**
- **Griefline: 1300 845 745**
Monday - Friday, 8am - 8pm (AEST)

You may consider visiting your GP to discuss your current symptoms if they are problematic. Your GP can refer you to local health professionals based on your needs or visit the **Lifeline Service Seeker Directory** at **<https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/service-finder>** to search for local services and centres in your area.



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