

# Self-care

Looking after yourself is one of the most important steps in coping with grief.

Here are some examples of small actions you can take to alleviate overwhelming feelings:

- Seek help from someone you trust
- Eat nourishing food
- Accept help when offered
- Sleep, or rest if sleep is challenging
- Cry when you need to
- Be gentle with yourself
- Be kind with your self-talk
- Talk about your loss
- Do some gentle walking with a friend
- Keep hydrated but avoid alcohol
- Take one day at a time
- Keep a journal of your experience
- Try to focus on things you are grateful for
- Find joy in small things
- Consider joining a support group
- Spend time with people who have had a similar experience



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# Coping with grief



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## What is grief?

**Grief affects every one of us and every aspect of our being. The impact of grief can be felt physically, mentally and emotionally and sometimes we don't know how to manage these responses, which can be very overwhelming.**

Having to deal with grief changes us. But over time we can use grief as an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and what really matters to us, which can result in feelings of strength and personal insight.

If you have lost someone that was an important part of your life, you may feel grief for a long time. Letting people know you need help, and accepting support when offered, can be a crucial part of working through your grief.

If over time you feel nothing is working and you can't see a way through your grief, you may need professional support (like counselling).

Understanding that grief takes time and every grief experience is unique can help to relieve feelings of stress or anxiety about whether our feelings are normal.

## Feelings of grief

**Grief is a normal reaction to loss and it shows up in ways you may not expect. Grief can cause a range of different feelings and responses. These will come and go – you may feel one or many of them as part of your process.**

Here are some common reactions:

### ANGER:

- At ourselves for our actions or responses
- At others, like medical professionals, for not doing enough to help

### FRUSTRATION:

- At how we feel towards our grief
- At others for their actions or how they are reacting to your grief

### GUILT:

- I didn't do enough
- I shouldn't be feeling like this
- I need to be stronger for my family

### LONELINESS:

- Feeling isolated from others
- Not knowing how to reach out and ask for help
- Feeling that no one understands what you're going through

### STRESS/ANXIETY:

- Panicking over small things
- Feeling overwhelmed when something is asked of you
- Trouble controlling your thoughts
- Crying for no apparent reason
- Obsessive thoughts about the deceased

### PHYSICAL REACTIONS:

- Trouble sleeping too much or not enough
- Change in appetite or digestive problems
- Headaches, aches or pains
- Issues with energy levels

### SOCIAL INTERACTION:

- Worry about relying on friends and family too much
- Reluctance to contact friends and family for help
- Wanting to be alone
- Not finding enjoyment in usual social outings
- Needing to be out of the house every day
- Buying things you don't need
- A desire to sell everything and move away

### FORGETFULNESS:

- Trouble remembering things you've just read or why you needed to go somewhere
- Feelings of general confusion or being uncharacteristically absent-minded

These are all common reactions. Grief is a very complex and unique experience. Whether you have felt one, a few, all or none of these – it is completely normal.

## When grief gets tough

**While you may feel as if you will never 'get over' your grief, how you experience the loss of a loved one is intensely personal and cannot be rushed – it takes time.**

How others have described their grief:

“It was about getting my heart and head connected”

“I lived and managed one day at a time”

“When I need a good cry, I have a good cry”

“I learned to go with the flow”

“The group I joined helped to normalise my grief and helped me feel that I'm not going crazy”

“It won't always be this bad”

“Believe it or not, the pain does ease”

Those closest to us don't always know how to cope with supporting someone through a grief process. You may find support in a place that surprises you but try to remain open to any offers of help that come your way and more importantly, don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it.

You will grieve in your own time and in your own way. Allow that process to happen, even if it feels uncomfortable, and trust that time will heal. It may feel like you are stuck in your grief at times, or that you keep falling back into how you felt when the death first happened. There will be times when it feels as if life will never be the same again. In truth, it never will be the same as it was before, but that's ok.

Again, don't be afraid to reach out for help if you need it. The support of another person is invaluable during this challenging time.

**Grief is like the ocean; it comes in waves, ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim.**

– VICKI HARRISON