

understanding grief and loss

(it's a natural part of life)

Grief is what happens after you lose someone or something important to you. You don't even have to know the person for their loss to impact you. Everyone experiences grief differently. Wondering if your response is normal seems to be a usual part of grieving.

What is grief?

Grief can affect pretty much every part of life. Sometimes it can make the simplest task feel like climbing a mountain.

You might feel:

- shock
- longing
- guilt
- disbelief
- anger
- abandonment
- pain
- resentment
- anxiety
- intense sadness
- regret
- worry.

The combination of any of these feelings might make it feel like you're in a washing machine and things are out of control. Other times you might only feel one of these emotions, or a numbness that doesn't feel like anything at all.

Changes to thoughts

When a big change happens in your life it can be hard not to think about it all the time. You might notice your mind wanders and you have trouble focusing.

Some people find it hard to care as much about the things they normally care about. It can feel like nothing matters compared to the loss they've experienced. Some people think that the world doesn't make sense anymore, and they can't figure out their place in it.

Changes in your body

Our mind and body are closely connected, so it makes sense that grief can have a big impact on our bodies. You might experience:

- headaches
- changes to eating routines
- body aches
- colds
- weight changes
- tiredness
- changes to your sleep
- generally feeling sick and run down.

Changes in what you do

You might notice some big changes in the sorts of things you do or don't do. After a big loss, some people feel like doing nothing. They can have trouble finding the energy to keep up with day-to-day life. Other people find that keeping busy helps them to get through.

How long will this go on for?

It can seem like the pain that comes with grief will never end. But it's important to know that eventually, things will get easier. It's really hard to guess how long grief will affect you because everyone's experience is different.

It might be helpful to think of grief like the ocean. Sometimes the power of the ocean is so strong you can feel out of control. Other times it feels manageable and you are able to drift along with the waves. The pain of grief can come in huge waves, smaller waves or sideways waves. Sometimes there might be waves you didn't see coming, and sometimes there are periods of calm between waves.

What else should I look out for?

When you're working through grief, you might have trouble maintaining relationships and feeling connected to others. You might not be as patient when you're grieving, or get in conflict with people more often. This can be hard, because staying connected to others is a really important part of getting through grief.

Grief isn't depression. But it's important to know that grief can leave you vulnerable to experiencing depression in the future. If you're not sure what's happening for you, it can be helpful to reach out for support.



During hard times, some people can turn to alcohol or other drugs to try to get through the pain. This might feel helpful at the time but it can create other problems and you might be more likely to say or do things you'll regret.

What can I do to deal with my grief?

Grief, and everything that can come with it, can be really intense. If you've experienced loss there are things you can do.

Healthy habits

Doing simple things for your physical health can really help you handle the challenges of grief. Start with little goals, like fitting in some fruits and veggies and drinking enough water. Exercising regularly and locking in good sleeping habits can also help.

Get into life

Find something that works for you like, playing or listening to music, walking, hanging out with friends, watching movies, playing sports or reading.

Take it easy on yourself

Remind yourself that grief hurts, it's hard and it takes time. Feeling confused, overwhelmed, angry (or anything else) and having a cry is OK.

Find someone who cares about you and let them in on what you're going through. If you're feeling up to it, let them know what you need from them. Maybe you just need them to listen, or maybe you need a distraction to get you through tough days.



If you've been experiencing grief for more than six months, it's important to ask for help.

Find a trusted friend, teacher, family member or Elder and let them in on what's happening for you. If you need more support, you have lots of options. You can:

- contact Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800) or Lifeline (13 11 14)
- check in with your local GP (general practitioner).



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

The headspace Clinical Reference Group have approved this clinical resource. Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, headspace makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. We disclaim all responsibility and liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage, cost or expense whatsoever in the use of or reliance upon this information. Version 1.0, 13 April 2019