

Coping with grief and loss



Relationships Australia®

VICTORIA

TIP SHEET

What is grief?

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

You may experience grief when:

- someone you love dies
- someone you love is diagnosed with a serious or terminal illness or disability
- you or your parents separate or divorce
- there is a natural disaster in your community
- your pet dies
- you or someone you love has to move to a different school, house, job, city or country
- a relationship with a friend, partner or family member changes or ends
- you experience a significant life change. This might include a change to your health, living arrangements and/or a loss of possessions.

What does grief look like?

Grieving is an individual process – everybody grieves differently and for different lengths of time.

As long as 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.

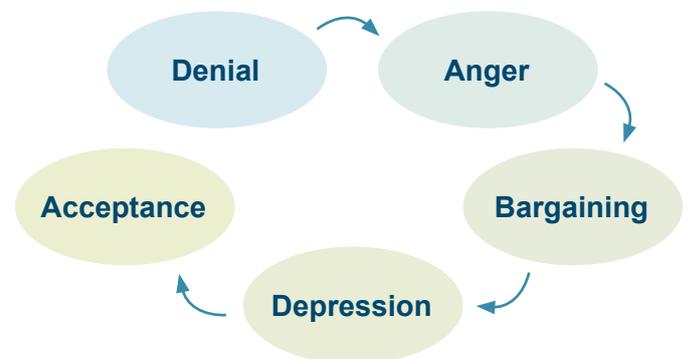
In the beginning, the waves of feelings might feel really overwhelming. It's not unusual for others to feel numb like they have no feelings at all.

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.

The Five Stages of Grief™

These are stages that people often go through when dealing with loss and bereavement. Grief is different for everyone, and not all people experience these exact stages in this order. The Five Stages of Grief™ framework (Kessler D and Kübler-Ross E) is designed as a tool to help people identify their feelings and manage their unique experience of grief.

Read more at grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief



Different forms of grief

Complicated grief

This is when complex factors relating to the loss get in the way of grieving. For example, if a loved one is hospitalised due to mental illness, a relationship changes because of addiction, or a family member discloses child abuse or family violence. This may also bring up strong feelings like anger or shame, which can make the situation hard to talk about.

Vicarious grief

Vicarious grief occurs when we hear about someone else's grief experience and feel it as if it were our own. Sometimes this can happen when we see something sad, such as a death or natural disaster on the news, or hear about another person's loss.

Anticipatory grief

Anticipatory grief is felt when we know that a loss is coming, for example when someone is diagnosed with a terminal illness, and begin to experience grief before the loss happens.

9 tips for coping with grief



1. Accept that grief takes time. It's unpredictable and may come and go in waves, often in unexpected moments.

Take each day as it comes and try not to think too far ahead. There is no set time for grieving.



2. Allow yourself to feel your grief and know that whatever you're feeling is okay.

Try writing down your thoughts each day to help process and understand them.



3. Reach out to people you trust for support.

Talking about your feelings and experiences can help you to process your grief in the long term. It can be hard to get started, but if you feel you need support, find a trusted person to talk to.



4. Consider ceremonies, rituals, memorials or remembrance meals or events.

These can allow you to share your memories, stories and feelings with people who care for you. They can also be markers for a new phase in your life.



5. Try to keep your usual routine as this can help you to feel more stable.

Maintain your set times for eating, exercise and sleep.



6. Do things you like doing and spend time with people you feel comfortable with.

Give yourself permission to 'take a break from grief' and do something relaxing and enjoyable. It doesn't mean that you don't care or aren't still grieving, just that you're looking after yourself.



7. Keep active. If you regularly exercise, try and keep your usual routine. If you're not someone who regularly exercises, try starting with just a 10-minute walk around your local area. Research shows that exercise can help with managing grief, loss, anxiety and depression.



8. Look after your body and remember to eat, even if you don't feel like it.

Try to eat fruits and vegetables, and avoid relying on caffeine, alcohol or drugs.



9. Seek professional help if you're feeling stuck or overwhelmed.

Deciding to get help can sometimes be tough, but it's a brave step in dealing with grief and loss.

Will things ever get better?

Most people find that the waves of grief they experience gradually happen less often and are less intense. This doesn't mean you're forgetting why you were grieving, or who for. It is 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 too will most likely settle down with time.



Need more help?

To make an appointment to chat to one of our counsellors, visit rav.org.au/counselling

If you, or someone you know, is in danger, phone emergency services now on 000 (triple zero).

For crisis support, phone:

- Griefline on 1300 845 745
- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- SuicideLine Victoria on 1300 651 251
- Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636
- MensLine Australia on 1300 78 99 78
- Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800

To find other organisations that can help, visit rav.org.au/resources/mental-health-services



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.