



# Bereavement | Grief and Coping with Loss

It is important to realise that grieving is a natural and normal process of adapting to the loss of someone close. Grieving is not a weakness. It is a necessity. Everyone experiences grief differently because our reaction depends on a range of individual factors, such as our personality, age, relationship with the deceased, cultural practices, the level of social support and our spiritual beliefs.

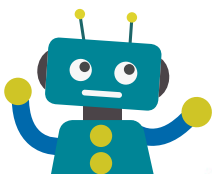
All bereaved people experience grief in one way or another. If we try and avoid it, grief will usually surface in the future – often in the form of emotional problems or physical illness. There is no “right way” to grieve. Misconceptions about the grieving process can make the bereaved person question their feelings and ability to cope.

- Anger
- Shock
- Anxiety
- Change in worldview
- Confusion
- Numbness
- Sadness and depression
- Sleeping difficulties
- Drop in self-esteem
- Difficulties in concentration
- Feeling unable to cope
- Guilt and remorse
- Yearning and Searching
- Disorganisation and Despair
- Shock and disbelief
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Loneliness
- Questioning of values and beliefs
- Reorganisation
- Relief

Understanding what grief can be like, finding ways to safely express strong emotions and coming up with coping strategies can help you endure the pain of your loss. Most people are protected by a kind of dazed disbelief until after the funeral. The full realisation of their loss comes much later.

## Grief isn't predictable

There are various models that describe a progression through stages and processes of grief. These may or may not help. They can help make sense of the range of emotions, thoughts and behaviours, or the models might make us expect grief to be predictable and orderly. The reality is that most of us will continue to grieve in subtle ways for the rest of our lives. Death ends a life, not a relationship.



You may need to experiment to find out which strategies are most helpful for you. These are some suggestions to help you through this hard time:

**Crying** – some people feel that crying isn't appropriate or else they're afraid that once they start crying, the tears won't stop. If you feel the need to cry, go ahead and do it. Crying is a normal human response to intense feelings. However, if there are no tears, it does not mean there is no grief. Many people cry alone, perhaps in the car or in the shower.

**Time alone** – schedule time alone every day to focus on your feelings and express them in whichever way feels natural to you. For example, you may choose to pray, cry, look through photographs of your loved one or write a diary.

**Activity** – many people find it important to engage in physical activity as a way of releasing tension and distracting themselves for a time from the intensity of grief.

**Time with your family** – schedule time to grieve as a family. This could include talking about the deceased, crying together and sharing your feelings. You may want help from friends and family, for instance with sorting out possessions.

**Support team** – actively seek out support. Others can't always make the first move. They may be afraid of intruding on your privacy. Make your needs known. This could include friends, workmates, doctors, community health centres, bereavement support groups or professional counsellors.

**Memorial** – you may like to write letters to your loved one, plant a memorial tree, put together a special photo album or commemorate their life in whichever ways feel meaningful to you and your family.

**Professional help** – Your General Practitioner (GP) may have helped care for the person during their last illness and may be the ideal person to talk to. Your GP may also offer a short course of medication to help you sleep or to help with symptoms of depression. Most GP surgeries will also have a counselling service available. Your GP will also be able to help with details of local support group. If you are feeling out of control – see your GP or doctor for help.

