

Dealing with grief and loss

A self help guide

Have you lost a loved one and think about them all the time? Does a past loss still cause you emotional distress? Are you finding it hard to cope?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then this self help guide aims to help you.

What is grief?

Grief is the feeling that follows the loss of a loved one. It is something that most of us will go through at some point in our life. It takes time to process our emotions about the loss and adjust to coping without that person in your life.

How does grief affect us?

It affects the way we feel: tearful, overwhelmed, helpless, numb, angry, scared
It affects the way we think: I wish I had them back, I miss them, what do I do now?
It affects our body: tired, exhausted, lacking in energy, poor concentration, poor sleep
It affects our behaviour: withdrawing, talking about the loss, avoiding certain people

Stages of grief

Kubler Ross (5 stages of grief) describes 5 primary responses to loss:

1. Denial – “this can’t be happening”
There is a refusal to accept the fact that the loss has occurred. Denial acts as a temporary defence which allows us to collect our self and mobilise fewer radical defences.
2. Anger – “why is this happening?”
When a loss occurs, we can become angry at ourselves or others. We argue that the situation is unfair and try to place blame. Our sorrow and pain are masked, and we lash out freely. This allows us to feel alive in a time of numbness.
3. Bargaining – “I will do anything to change this”
We may try to change or delay our loss by convincing a partner to return to us. This is the time when we may even turn to a higher being for guidance as we attempt to postpone the inevitable.
4. Depression – “what is the point of going on?”
We recognise that the loss is real and has occurred. We isolate ourselves and spend time crying and grieving. We go over and over in our minds the positive and negative aspects of the relationship.
5. Acceptance – “it’s going to be okay”
We come to accept the loss and understand the situation logically and this helps us to come to terms emotionally. We are drawn towards our future and reinvest in our life. This is the time when our healing and adjustment take a firm hold.

These stages of grief can overlap, occur together or some stages can be missed out. Grief is not a linear journey but a series of stages we revisit as we adjust to life without someone we love.

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Tips to help you manage your grief

1. **Write a goodbye letter to the person you have lost** (fill in the blanks)

To.....

I am saying goodbye because.....

Saying goodbye makes me feel.....

I remember a time when we.....

You taught me.....

Something I want you to know is....

I will always remember.....

Goodbye from.....

2. **Make good use of your time**

When we experience a loss, our motivation can decrease, and you might find that you have given up activities that you previously enjoyed. Try to plan activities in your diary/calendar. Give yourself something to look forward to as you move towards a different future.

3. **Look after yourself**

When we are in a period of mourning it can be easy to search for a crutch to help us cope. You might reach for alcohol, drugs, smoking, caffeine etc, but all of these can have a detrimental impact on our mood. The numbing affect that we crave can quickly turn into a habit that we cannot control.

4. **Social relationships**

Getting support from our friends and family can really help us to cope better. The feelings of security we find can help us to feel less alone and can help to ease the void that has been left in our life as a result of the loss of a loved one.

5. **Healthy lifestyle**

Even though you may not feel like it try to eat regular meals and stay hydrated as this can have a positive effect on your physical and mental health. Try to get some gentle exercise each week as this can help you to sleep better.

6. **Do not let anybody tell you how to feel**

Your grief is your own Let yourself feel your emotions without embarrassment or judgement. It is ok to scream, to be angry, to cry or not cry. It is also ok to laugh and find moments of joy. It is okay to look forward to life

7. **Plan for grief triggers**

Anniversaries, holidays, birthdays, music, can all awaken memories and stir up feelings. Be prepared for the emotional sledgehammer to the head and heart and know that it is completely normal to feel the loss all over again.

8. **Talk to a professional**

If your grief feels like it is too much to bear talk to a professional. This will allow you to explore your thoughts, feelings, and memories in a safe confidential environment without fear of judgement.

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