

There is no 'right' way to grieve – everyone is different, and will have different feelings and reactions to the loss.

Grief



Grief is the reaction we experience when we lose someone close, whether a family member or a friend. Grieving is normal. It can happen immediately after a loss, and also in the months and years that follow. There is no 'right' way to grieve – everyone is different, and will have different feelings and reactions to the loss. Grief is affected by things like personality, your relationship to the person, and the amount of support that you have.

Feelings of grief

There are many types of reactions that can occur during grieving. They can include:

- Shock and disbelief that the person has died
- Longing for the person – wishing they were around, to be able to touch them or be comforted by them
- Feelings of anger or resentment – for being abandoned, for the unfairness of the loss, or towards those seen as responsible for the loss
- Feeling sad that the person has gone
- Guilt – for example that you were unable to save the person, or that you survived while they did not

- Anxiety – about the future, about how things will be without your loved one, or about your own safety
- Always thinking about the person who has died
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes to your sleep patterns and appetite

Grieving can take time. It's not unusual to have ups and downs over months or years when dealing with the death of a loved one. Most people, though, are able to carry on with life while grieving. Things usually get easier as time goes on, especially after the first six months, and you gradually experience more good times and less difficult times.

Things that might help in managing grief

- Accept your feelings. It's OK to feel sad about losing someone special, and to take time in coming to terms with what has happened. Losing someone is stressful and upsetting, and it's normal to experience strong emotions
- Allow yourself time to grieve and maybe to cry. You might need a safe place at home or at school to go when you're especially sad
- Take time out. Being around other people can sometimes be stressful and overwhelming, especially if they are also grieving. Go for a walk, listen to some music, sit in a park or do something enjoyable like shopping or going to a movie
- Looking after yourself is really important, try to keep regular; sleep, eating and exercise routines – these things can feel hard to keep up, yet they can have an impact on your mental, emotional and physical health
- Collect memories of your loved one in a way that feels right for you. Perhaps write about them and the things you did with them. Collect photos, make a scrap book or journal, create a website or blog, write music or poetry, or create some artwork
- Find a way to say goodbye in your own way and in your own time. This might mean going to the funeral, writing them a letter, or having a memorial service
- Express your feelings in some way. Talking to others can be helpful, but it's not the only way. For example, write about your feelings, or use music or art to express your thoughts
- Allow yourself to feel happy and to move on with your life without feeling guilty. People sometimes feel bad if they let themselves smile, or if they seem to be moving on. It doesn't mean that you have forgotten the person you have lost. Your loved one would have wanted good things in your life
- Plan for times that may be hard, like Christmas or anniversaries. Perhaps arrange to spend time with friends or do something enjoyable for yourself
- Find your own way to stay connected, honour and remember the person who has died



Complicated grief

Most people who have lost someone special are able to process their grief and slowly move forward with their lives. For some people, though, grief lasts longer than usual, is severe, and gets in the way of their everyday life.

'Complicated grief' describes grief which continues at a high level and affects how you function for at least six months. Signs of complicated grief can include:

- Continuing, intense yearning for the person who has died
- Strong anger or guilt
- Difficulties in your relationships with others
- Problems with concentration, memory, sleeping, eating, school or work

Some people with complicated grief also have problems like depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, or even think of suicide. These problems can be treated, but the person needs a proper assessment by a health professional.

If you have thoughts of suicide or plans to harm yourself, it's really important to seek immediate help. Talk to someone you trust, or contact your local mental health service, crisis team or hospital emergency department. They will help you to work out a plan to keep safe.

Grief and disaster

When someone dies in a disaster like a flood or bushfire, it can be even harder to cope with. Disasters are usually unexpected, so you have no time to prepare. Disasters usually have an effect not just on you, but also on your friends, family and community.

Dealing with the disaster itself can be difficult enough. Dealing with the loss of friends or loved ones, the loss of your home or school, or major disruptions to your life can add to the emotional stress.

Finding help

If your grief is continuing for a long time, or is very upsetting, or is stopping you from getting on with life, then talk to a health professional. Getting some help early can mean that the problems can be dealt with before they become more serious.

It's important to find someone you trust and feel comfortable with. There are local doctors and other health professionals who are experienced in working with young people who have experienced grief and loss.

A good place to start might be your local community health centre or **headspace** centre. You could talk with a trusted friend, teacher or family member about finding some help. It's important to remember that you don't need to talk about the details of the experience if you don't feel comfortable or safe to do so.

For more information, and to find out how to get help, visit **headspace.org.au**

Acknowledgements

Raphael, B. (2010), 'Children, Adolescents and Families: Grief and Loss in Disaster', Australian Child & Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network, Australian National University, Canberra ReachOut Australia

This information was produced thanks to the generous support of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund and has been developed in collaboration with the Victorian Department of Health.

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