

Grief and loss

What is 'grief and loss'?

Grief is a natural response to loss. Grieving the loss of someone, or something such as a job, an opportunity, a pet or a way of life, can have significant effects on every part of our life, including our cognitive capacity, our mood and motivation. The more significant the loss, the more intense the grief is likely to be.

Grief can leave you feeling sad, angry, anxious, shocked, regretful, relieved, overwhelmed, isolated, irritable or numb. These reactions are not permanent or constant but instead can come in waves. These 'waves of grief' are often triggered by memories or occasions that we associate with the person, place or situation.

The most intense periods of grief are usually within the first few days after a loss however, some grieving processes can be delayed with the reality of the matter yet to fully sink in. We often hear people referring to being on 'auto pilot' during grief and this is mostly a self-protective mechanism so we can 'get through'. At some point, it can be healthy to sit with feelings of grief and loss and allowing emotions to flow, as a way of processing what has happened.

Allow yourself to grieve and heal

Grieve your way. No one can tell you how to feel.

- Understand that grief takes time. Expect that you will sometimes find yourself surprised by how you are feeling.
- Express how you feel to someone you trust. Talk using words that are comfortable and have meaning to you and don't be afraid to share your emotions; your tears, anger, relief etc.
- Honour your loss. It might be by writing a journal of memories, writing letters, treasuring precious possessions, planting a tree, writing a song; whatever feels meaningful to you.
- Be prepared for difficult events that trigger your memories and sadness. This may happen when performing certain tasks at work, reading news articles, having conversations with peers or perhaps when you see particular reminders of what you have lost.
- Take one step at a time. Know that there will be setbacks but that time will improve the way you are feeling and thinking.

Look after yourself

Sometimes, looking after ourselves when grieving is the last thing we feel like doing, however there are some key self-care aspects we need to be mindful of, to assist in our own unique process.

- Find a balance between spending time with family and friends and being alone. Both are important in your time of grief.
- Take care of your physical health. Grieving expends a lot of energy, eating healthy and keeping up fluid intake is important.
- Give yourself a time out. Allowing yourself a break from the pain can be difficult or cause feelings of guilt however doing things you enjoy, even if you don't really feel like doing them is important to disrupt the intense feelings of emotional pain.
- When you feel it is appropriate, depending on the nature of the grief, making efforts to get back to your normal routine, work, social activities, sport etc. can help with reducing emotional pain.
- Being mindful of your use of drugs and alcohol, noticing if your use or reliance is changing.
- If possible, avoid making any big decisions until you can think more clearly.
- Consider your spiritual beliefs and whether these can provide you comfort.

Let others help you

Grief and loss can be a very private and personal experience for some people. Being open to and allowing others to help you in this time of need can assist the process as well as assist others who may be grieving along-side you.

- Be clear about what you find helpful from others. People often don't know how to help, so tell them what you need; a shoulder to cry on, a helping hand with the children or perhaps help with a few meals.
- Explore your options for professional help if your grief feels too much for you to bear. An experienced health professional can help you work through intense emotions and overcome obstacles to your grieving.
- Consider joining a support group. Sharing your grief with others who have experienced similar losses may help.

Useful links

- 1. [Grief and loss - Beyond Blue](#)
- 2. [Understanding grief - Headspace](#)
- 3. [Resources - Grief Australia](#)

Parliamentary Workplace Support Service

The PWSS provides independent and confidential support to all Commonwealth parliamentary workplace participants. PWSS are available for debriefing, in the moment, as case coordinators are readily available, 24/7.

The PWSS can provide bespoke well-being sessions and group debriefs to assist with an individual and/or a team's response to a critical incident and how managers and staff can best support each other during a challenging time.



www.PWSS.gov.au



24/7 Support: 1800 747 977



SMS: 0487 112 755