



Your grief is personal, but you're not alone

Grieving can be a profoundly difficult time, giving rise to painful and sometimes confusing emotions. You may feel lonely, but please know you are not alone.

What's inside:

- How we experience grief
- What we can do to care for ourselves
- Where to find support





How we experience grief

Grief is a reaction to loss, and we all experience it differently. We may even experience the loss of someone in different ways over the course of our grief. It's all normal. Really.

Many factors shape our grief:

- who we have lost
- how they died
- our relationship with the deceased
- our religious, cultural and personal beliefs
- our support systems.

When someone significant to us is ill for some time before they die, we may experience anticipatory grief — a type of grief that is painful but allows us to prepare both emotionally and practically while they are still alive. Grief after an unexpected death, such as from heart attack or stroke, can feel different. We may feel blindsided by the suddenness of our loss, have unresolved questions or wish we'd had the chance to say goodbye.

“Grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it.”

– Joan Didion, author

Grief can manifest in different ways and evolve over time:

- **feelings**, such as shock, anger, denial, sadness, guilt, blame, relief, fear, numbness and loneliness
- **physical symptoms**, such as fatigue, headaches, nausea and digestive issues, tension, dizziness and shortness of breath, chest pains or irregular heartbeat, appetite changes, confusion and difficulty concentrating
- **behavioural changes**, such as shutting down, isolating, having outbursts of anger, crying unexpectedly, laughing at seemingly inappropriate times, losing motivation.

Grief is often non-linear. After the death of someone significant, we should not simply expect to feel a little bit better every day. It's normal to move through a range of feelings, physical symptoms and behavioural changes in no set sequence. Reactions may seem to come out of nowhere, even after we thought our grief had subsided. Grief takes the time it takes. Being patient with the process fosters healing.

We may feel guilty about letting go of grief. Remember that healing from grief doesn't mean our loss was not significant; it just means it does not have to define us.

Healing means we can remember the person we've lost with more feelings of fondness or love than pain. It can also mean finding a way to sustain our care for that person while moving forward with our life.



“The only cure for grief is to grieve.”
– Trent Dalton, author and journalist

How we can care for ourselves

In times of grief, our own well-being can seem less important. It can be easy to skip meals, lose sleep or avoid our usual routines. We may be inclined to hide out alone or indulge in harmful behaviours. We may double down on work or carry on as if everything is okay.

Those are all normal reactions. And yet it's important to remember that caring for ourselves still matters.

Nurture your daily life

Showering or doing the dishes can feel like daunting tasks when we're grieving, so initially we may need to relax our standards. That said, self-care can help us feel a little better.

- Eat regular and healthy meals, even if your appetite has changed.
- Accept help from people you trust to do things like cooking, grocery shopping and taking care of children, if you feel overwhelmed.
- Keep to a regular sleep schedule, even if your quality or quantity of rest is being affected by your grief.
- Spend some time moving — a walk around the block or gentle exercises can improve how you feel.
- Restore regular routines, such as getting dressed, putting away laundry or walking the dog.
- Hold off from making big life decisions at the height of your grief.

Allow yourself to find comfort

It's okay and even helpful to take breaks from grieving and make space for comfort and joy.

- Plan time outdoors, especially in nature.
- Find short-term escape in activities such as watching a rom-com, going to a hockey game or soaking in the bath.
- Spend time with family and friends who understand and support you.



Avoid harmful activities

People who are grieving are more likely to turn to unhealthy coping behaviours.

- Be mindful of addictive behaviours, such as abusing drugs and alcohol, gambling, over- or undereating, spending too much time online or overspending.
- Talk with a medical professional or seek help from a support organization, if these become a worry.
- Try not to isolate yourself too much.

Express your grief

Naming and describing our thoughts and feelings, and sharing them with others, can relieve suffering and help us heal.

- Take a few moments to sit and reflect or journal.
- Talk with compassionate friends and family or people who also knew and cared about the person you're grieving.
- Choose meaningful activities that honour your loved one or help you express your feelings, such as crafting, volunteering, fundraising or visiting a special place.



**“Losing my dad was devastating for the entire family.
Five years later, I still miss him, every day.”**

– Anna Fortini, lost her dad to heart failure

“Each person’s grief is as unique as their fingerprint. But what everyone has in common is that no matter how they grieve, they share a need for their grief to be witnessed.”

– **David Kessler, author**



Where to find support

Across cultures, grief is shared in the company of others as a means of healing. Studies support the benefits of reading, joining support groups or working with therapists to process grief. These experiences can even lead to post-traumatic growth and a life of greater meaning and peace.



Recommended websites, books, podcasts and courses

- **MyGrief**, from the Canadian Virtual Hospice, is a free resource that helps you navigate grief with modules you can follow at your own pace.
- This Canadian Mental Health Association **brochure** explains what grief is and how you can help yourself or others.
- The National Funeral Directors Association’s website, **Remembering a Life**, educates families about grief and funeral planning and features a podcast and book club.
- *Psychology Today* has a **section of articles about grief**.
- **Grief expert David Kessler’s website** offers free and paid resources.

Grief support groups

- *Psychology Today* has a **directory of grief support groups by location**.

Therapy and counselling

- The **Hope For Wellness Helpline** is available to Indigenous people across Canada via chat or phone.
- *Psychology Today* offers a **directory of grief therapists** by location.

Your grief is your path

May you find compassion, ease and meaning over the course of your grief journey. However you are experiencing your loss, remember there is hope and there is help.



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