

# Grief & Loss

## Navigating loss with compassion and understanding

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Grief is the natural response to loss; not only the death of a loved one, but any meaningful loss: a relationship, a career, a health diagnosis, a version of a future you imagined, a pregnancy, a friendship, or a sense of safety. Grief is *not* a problem to be fixed. It is evidence of love, attachment, and the depth of what mattered to you.

### Understanding Grief

Grief does not follow a neat progression through stages. It is non-linear, moving between waves of intense pain and periods of relative stability. The Dual Process Model of grief describes this oscillation: moving between loss-orientation (focusing on the grief and the loss) and restoration-orientation (attending to life, building new identity, finding meaning). Both are necessary. *Neither means you are doing it wrong.*

#### Normal grief

Profound sadness, crying, anger, guilt, anxiety, numbness, physical exhaustion, difficulty concentrating, and even moments of relief or laughter — all are normal parts of grief. There is no timeline. There is *no right way* to grieve.

### When Grief Becomes Complicated

Prolonged Grief Disorder (formerly complicated grief) involves intense grief that does not show signs of integration after approximately 12 months (6 months for some criteria). Signs include: inability to accept the reality of the loss, persistent yearning so intense it disrupts daily life, avoidance of reminders, feeling that life is meaningless, identity disruption, and difficulty engaging in life. Many people who seek support with a professional do experience profound improvement.

### Evidence-Based Support Tools

#### 01 Allow the Grief

Resisting or suppressing grief does not reduce it, it delays and intensifies it. When waves of emotion arrive, rather than fighting them, allow them. Set aside specific time to grieve ("grief appointments") if you need to function during the day, but ensure the waves are not permanently suppressed.

#### 02 Meaning-Making

Research by Robert Neimeyer shows that finding *meaning* in loss — not why it happened, but what it means and how to integrate it into your story — is one of the strongest predictors of adaptation. Journaling, storytelling, and therapy all support this process. What did this loss teach you about what matters? What do you want to carry forward?

#### 03 Continuing Bonds

Modern grief theory recognizes that healthy grief does not require letting go, but rather involves transforming the relationship with the person or thing lost. Keep photos, rituals, or practices that maintain connection while also building a life going forward.

#### 04 Social Support and Witnessed Grief

Grief is not meant to be carried alone. Seek people who can sit with you in pain without trying to fix it. Grief support groups (in person or online) offer the powerful experience of being understood by others who truly know loss. You *do not* need to protect people from your grief.

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#### 05 Restoration Activities

Oscillating toward life is not a betrayal of the person or thing lost. Allow yourself moments of laughter, pleasure, engagement with new experiences, and the building of new routines. These are not signs that you didn't love — they are signs that you are integrating.

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#### 06 Body-Based Care

Grief lives in the body; exhaustion, physical pain, changed appetite, and immune suppression are common. Prioritize gentle physical movement, nourishing food, hydration, and sleep. Body-based practices such as yoga, walking in nature, and somatic therapy can access and release grief in ways that words alone cannot.

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### Supporting Yourself Through Grief

- Lower your expectations of productivity and "functioning" → grief takes energy
- Lean on your support system more than feels comfortable
- Avoid using alcohol or substances to numb, as this often prolongs and complicates grief
- Mark anniversaries, birthdays, and milestones intentionally — these are often harder in anticipation than in reality
- Know that a good day is not a betrayal, and a bad day three years later does not mean you've regressed

### Resources

- The Grief Recovery Method: [griefrecoverymethod.com](http://griefrecoverymethod.com)
- What's Your Grief: [whatsyourgrief.com](http://whatsyourgrief.com)
- Canadian Virtual Hospice: [mygrief.ca](http://mygrief.ca)
- Grief support groups through community hospices and mental health organizations