



Coping with grief and loss

The pain of grief and loss can feel overwhelming and you may have to face some painful, unwanted changes in your life. As a result, you may experience all kinds of strong and unexpected emotions, from shock or anger to disbelief, guilt, and deep sadness. The grief can also affect your physical health, making it difficult to think straight, sleep, or eat.

These are all normal reactions to significant loss. Grief is a very individual process, and there's no right or wrong way to grieve. What is important is that you allow yourself time to grieve and come to terms with your loss in whatever way is right for you.

During this time you may need the support of others. Speaking to someone about how you feel and the changes you are facing may help you feel less alone with your grief. This can be a difficult time for family and friends who may be worried about speaking about the person who has died for fear of upsetting you. You may have to take the first step and let others know if you want to talk about your loss in order to receive support.

The grieving process

The grieving process takes time. It can't be forced, hurried or skipped over, and there is no typical timescale. Sadness, disappointment and feelings of anger or injustice may need to be explored and expressed.

Feelings of grief can be on a spectrum ranging from, at one end, a sense of being overwhelmed with unbearable pain, and at the other end, controlling and avoiding your feelings. You can move backwards and forwards on the spectrum of grief on any given day or week depending on what's going on in your life. And how you cope can depend on many different factors including:

- Earlier life experiences
- Personality and coping style
- Faith or spirituality
- How significant the loss was to you
- Circumstances around how the person died
- Stressful relationship issues
- Mental / physical health problems
- Messages from family and wider society about grieving and loss
- Seeing how other people grieve

- Your own personal, financial or professional circumstances

Some people start to feel better in weeks or months. If your loss was expected and uncomplicated, and you've got a lot of support and psychological resources, you may find you cope better with the loss.

For others, the grieving process is measured in years. Whatever your experience, be patient with yourself and allow the process to unfold.

In time, the deep and overwhelming feelings of sadness will lessen, though there will still be times when you miss the person who died and feel sad.

Symptoms of grief

Physical	Emotional
Shock and numbness (a normal way to react to the news of a death) Being over or under active Feelings of unreality Physical distress such as chest or stomach pains, Change in appetite or weight Headaches, nausea Sleeping problems or tiredness Restlessness Crying and sighing The area near your heart can hurt, as if it were broken and breathing difficulties Tightness in the throat Dry mouth and skin Lowered immunity Increased sensitivity to loud noises Difficulty in maintaining concentration; forgetfulness	Sadness – including feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness Anger (you may want to blame someone for the injustice) Confusion Fear Worry about your own or others' mortality Panic Relief (especially when your friend or family member was suffering) Irritability Regret or guilt about things you did or didn't say or do, even if there was nothing more you could have done Loneliness Temporary loss of meaning in life Vulnerability Abandonment
Behaviour	Social
Frequent retelling of the story of the loved one's death Searching for, or talking to the person who died Frequent thoughts about the one who died Sensing their presence or dreaming about the person who died Feeling distant from others, and it may seem like no one cares or understands what it's like Wandering aimlessly	Very sensitive Dependent Withdrawn Avoid others Lack of motivation Lack of interest

Myths and facts about grieving

Myth: The pain will go away faster if you ignore it.

Fact: Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing can make it worse in the long run. For real healing, it is usually necessary to face your grief and actively deal with it.

Myth: It's important to 'be strong' in the face of loss.

Fact: Feeling sad, frightened, or lonely is a normal reaction to loss. Crying doesn't mean you are weak. You don't need to 'protect' your family or friends by 'being strong' or putting on a brave face. Showing your true feelings can help them and you.

Myth: If you don't cry, it means you aren't sorry about the loss.

Fact: Crying is a normal response to sadness, but it's not the only one. People who don't cry may feel the pain just as deeply as others. They may simply have other ways of expressing it.

Myth: Grieving should last about a year.

Fact: There is no specific time frame for grieving. How long it takes differs from person to person.

Myth: Moving on with your life means forgetting about your loss.

Fact: Moving on means you've accepted your loss - but that's not the same as forgetting. You can move on with your life and keep the memory of someone or something you lost as an fundamental part of you. In fact, as we move through life, these memories can become a more important part of the person we are.

Grief in children and young people

Children sense when something is wrong and if they are not told the truth in a way that they can understand, or if people try to protect them by not talking to them about what is happening, they can imagine things that are not true or are far worse than reality.

Even very young children will have some awareness of the death of someone they love and will feel sadness and distress.

They may experience the same symptoms of grief as adults, but they may also express it differently. They may not be openly sad but may 'play out' their feelings rather than talking about them. Their behaviour might change, for example, bedwetting, clinging, behaving more childishly, or sleeping problems. Some children are afraid that they or someone else close to them will become ill and die, or that in some way they are responsible for what is happening. Sleep may be disturbed and they may become fearful of the dark or have bad dreams. They might go back to earlier stages in their childhood and behave in a more childish way, including wetting the bed.

Ways to help include

- Responding to any questions honestly and simply
- Sticking to your usual routines where possible
- Encourage children to express their emotions
- Don't be worried about showing your own feelings

It is important for children and young people of all ages to feel that they are part of the changes that the whole family is experiencing, including the funeral. If you find this too difficult to face right now, it may help to ask another adult to provide reassurance and help explain the arrangements and process.

Help with grief

While grieving a loss is an inevitable part of life, there are ways to help you cope. You could think of the grieving process as a roller coaster, full of ups and downs, highs and lows, and the ride tends to be steeper in the beginning. The difficult periods should become less intense and shorter as time goes by, but it takes time to work through a loss. Even years after the death of someone important, particularly at special events such as a family wedding or the birth of a child, we may still experience a strong sense of grief.

You may also need to take a break from your grief, so that you can have some relief. Some people do it by going back to work, others by getting involved in an absorbing project or activity, or through exercise. You may only be able to do this for short amounts of time during the first few weeks, but even a small amount can help.

- **Face your feelings.** Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss may prolong the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.
- **Don't let anyone tell you how you 'should' feel,** and don't put pressure on yourself to feel a certain way either. Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it". People can feel awkward when trying to comfort someone who's grieving. They may feel unsure about how to comfort you and end up saying or doing the wrong things. They may also be uncomfortable with you expressing your true feelings. It takes courage not to avoid these feelings just to make others feel better. Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to shout, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.
- **Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.** Write about your loss in a journal; write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organisation that was important to the person who has died.
- **Try to maintain your hobbies and interests.** There's comfort in routine, and returning to activities you enjoy and which connect you to other people, can help you come to terms with your loss and help the grieving process.
- **Ask for help.** Try not to isolate yourself. Speaking to someone about how you feel and the changes you are facing may help you feel less alone with your grief. If friends or family reach out, it's because they care about you, even if they don't know how to help. They may be nervous of speaking about the person

who has died for fear of upsetting you. You may have to take the first step and let others know if you want to talk about your loss in order to receive support.

- **Plan ahead for grief triggers.** Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wave, and know that it's completely normal. If you're sharing a holiday or big life stage event with other friends or family, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on ways to honour the person you loved.
- **Take care of yourself.** The mind and body are connected. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. When you feel healthy physically, you'll be better able to cope emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising.

Most people do find a way to adapt to their loss over time, but many people also find it helpful to have extra support, particularly if you find it difficult to talk to family and friends, or if you feel you are not coping. The Community Bereavement Service provides support to children, young people and adults. It offers one to one, family and group bereavement support, and you can refer yourself by phone to 01534 285144 or email to bereavement@jerseyhospicecare.com.

Coping with reminders of loss

Reminders of the death of someone you were close to can bring back the pain of loss even many years later, particularly around the time of special occasions or important dates, or linked to certain sights, sounds, or smells.

These feelings are sometimes called an anniversary reaction. They're not a setback in the grieving process. They're a reflection that your loved one's life was important to you.

The course of grief is unpredictable. Anniversary reactions can be powerful and intense sometimes and may last for several days or longer. During an anniversary reaction you might experience the intense emotions and reactions you suffered when that person died.

Anniversary reactions can also evoke powerful memories of the feelings and events surrounding your loved one's death. For example, you might remember in great detail where you were and what you were doing when your loved one died.

Tips to cope with reawakened grief

- **Be prepared.** Anniversary reactions are normal. Knowing that you're likely to experience them may help you understand them and even turn them into opportunities for healing.
- **Plan a distraction.** A catch up with friends or a visit to the cinema at times when you're likely to feel alone or be reminded of your loved one's death can help distract you.
- **Reminisce about your relationship.** Focus on the good things about your relationship with your loved one and the time you had together, rather than the loss. Write a letter to them, or a note about some of your good memories. You can add to this note anytime.
- **Start a new tradition.** Make a donation to a charitable organization in your loved one's name on birthdays or holidays, or plant a tree in their honour.

- **Connect with others.** Draw friends and loved ones close to you, including people who were special to the person who died. Find someone who'll encourage you to talk about your loss. Stay connected to your usual support systems, such as spiritual leaders and social groups. Consider joining a bereavement support group.
- **Allow yourself to feel a range of emotions.** It's OK to be sad and feel a sense of loss, but also allow yourself to experience joy and happiness. As you celebrate special times, you might find yourself both laughing and crying.

When grief doesn't go away

As time passes following a significant loss, it's normal for feelings of sadness, numbness, or anger to gradually ease. These and other difficult emotions become less intense as you begin to accept the loss and start to move forward with your life. However, if you aren't feeling better over time, or your grief is getting worse, it may be a sign that your grief has developed into a more serious problem, such as complicated grief or major depression. If you think this may be the case, please talk to your GP.

Resources

Talking to children about death – St Catherine's Hospice: <https://www.stch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/talking-to-children-v1.pdf>

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/about-grief/about-bereavement>

<https://www.dyingmatters.org/>

<https://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/Bereavement.asp>

<https://thegoodgriefproject.co.uk/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/>

www.samaritans.org If you're in distress and need support, you can ring Samaritans for free at any time of the day or night. Freephone 116 123 (24 hours) free from any phone. Email jo@samaritans.org

[Bereavement guidance from St Joseph's Hospice](#)

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>