

An emotional support guide to help manage loss and grief

Here you will find information on:

- feelings you may experience;
- signposting to support organisations;
- self help tools and techniques.

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Introduction

Loss is something that binds us together as human beings, and grief is a part of life that all of us will experience when we suffer loss, whether it takes the form of someone's death, losing a job, a relationship, hopes, dreams, or other things that you value.

Powerful feelings of grief and loss are so normal and natural that they are typically not given a 'diagnosis' like other conditions such as anxiety or depression. There is no right way to grieve and no 'quick fix', but there are ways that you can help yourself to come to terms with your loss.

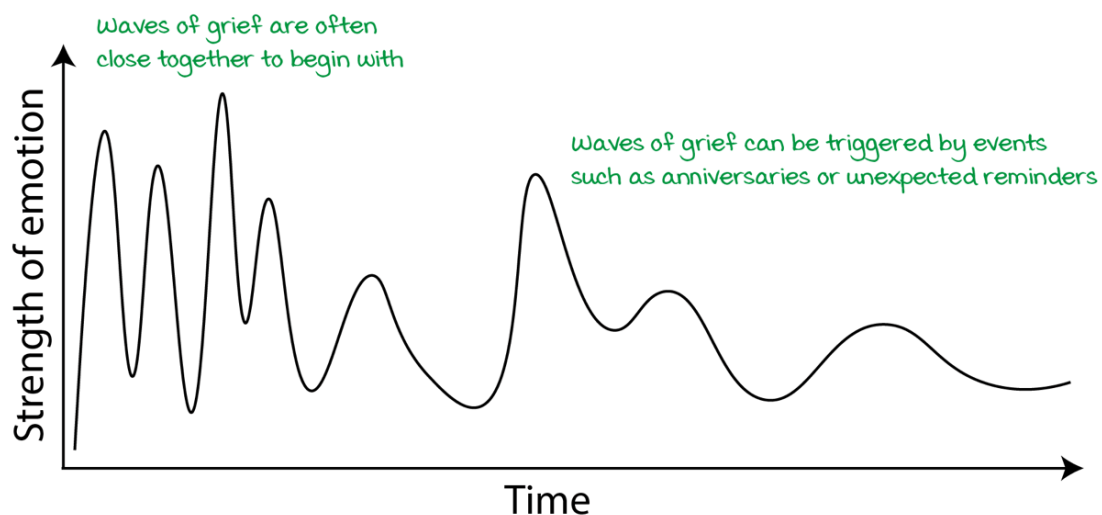
While no two people experience loss and grief in the same way, several experiences are common to many when grieving.

What is grief?

Grief is more than just sadness and you might be overwhelmed by a variety of different emotions and feelings in your body as your grief changes over time. Grief is different for everyone: everyone deals with it in their own unique way.

Grief often feels like it comes in waves that can initially feel intense and overwhelming. To begin with, the waves feel intense and frequent, but over time they tend to be spaced further apart and feel more manageable.

These waves of grief can feel like they come out of nowhere, or can be triggered when you are reminded of the loss you have experienced.



How you might be feeling

Grief affects people in different ways. There's no particular way you should be feeling, or length of time it will take for you to start to feel more like yourself again. It's important to let yourself grieve in your own way.

There are a few feelings that people commonly describe, but your own experience might be different. It's normal for your feelings to be chaotic and it might be hard to pin down exactly how you're feeling. Intense feelings can be frightening, but they usually ease over time.

We can separate the effects of grief into thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. You might experience some, all, or none of these.

How you might think and remember	How you might feel emotionally	How you might act
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughts about unfairness • Worries about how you will cope • Anger at the person for leaving you • Thoughts you can't go on • Thoughts about what you should have done or said • Thoughts about how things are going to be different • Thoughts about what you are going to miss • Wishing that you had done things differently • Unwanted memories • Dreams or nightmares • Happy memories • Thoughts that they're at peace • Thoughts that they are not suffering 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strong emotions 2. Fear / Anxiety 3. Guilt 4. Regret 5. Numb 6. Hopeless / Helpless 7. Anger 8. Sadness 9. Yearning / Longing 10. Frustration 11. Forgetfulness 12. Irritable 13. Tired / Fatigued 14. Pain / Heartache 15. Emptiness 16. No feelings at all 17. Shock / Disbelief 18. Feeling sick 19. Unable to eat 20. Unable to sleep 21. Relief 22. Peace / Content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dwell, ruminate, ponder • Avoid reminders • Avoid being alone • Avoid being with people • Carry on as normal • Keep busy • Tell other people you feel ok • Stay in bed • Stop doing things that you used to do • Drink alcohol • Distract yourself • Behave recklessly, take risks • Remember them • Visit their resting place • Want to be near them • Talk to them • Look at photos • Speak to people who were close to them • Look through their belongings

Physical effects of grief

Like other forms of stress and anxiety, loss and grief can produce physical symptoms, such as:

- exhaustion
- loss of appetite or comfort eating
- feeling sick or an upset stomach
- panic attacks
- aches and pains, such as chest pain and headaches
- disturbed sleep or nightmares
- restlessness or hyperactivity.

Grief can make you more vulnerable to illness so consider how you can look after yourself.

Feelings of hopelessness

Sometimes, people feel there's no point seeking help because it won't change things and you may feel powerless. Remind yourself that your own life has a purpose and you can start finding things that will become important to you again.

Others response to your loss and your grief

It is natural for your friends and loved ones to want to be supportive. Sometimes though, you might find that the way that other people respond to you can be unhelpful. For instance, other people might:

- feel uncomfortable and not know what to say;
- find it difficult to talk about your loss with you and change the subject;
- avoid you;
- expect you to feel better and move on before you are ready;
- not know how to respond in the way you need;
- say things like "aren't you over it yet?";
- want to talk about it too much with you;
- shut you down, or try to cheer you up when actually you just want to talk about it.

Remember that it's OK to let people know what you need and what you don't.

Grief can be like a rollercoaster: there will be times when you want to talk and other times when you don't. Sometimes you might want a distraction and to not think about it, at other times all you might want to do is talk about how you feel. You may not know what you need from others and this can be confusing for you and them.

Remember that there are no rules – whatever you're feeling is OK.

Signposting and Support

Talking to people about what has happened and how you're feeling can help. If you're concerned about anything you're thinking or feeling, talk to your GP or a support organisation, such as:

University Counselling Provision

There are times when we all need some extra support to balance the demands of everyday life. That is why the University provides a free and confidential counselling service (EAP) for staff who can self-refer by ringing 01225 825960 or 01225 824484.

Also, the Education Support Partnership is an independent counselling service. It is a charity that supports staff in higher education. They provide a 24/7 telephone and email helpline. You can contact them directly by phone: 08000 562561 or email: support@edsupport.org.uk.

University Chaplaincy

The Chaplaincy is staffed by friendly Chaplains, is open for regular events each week, and is home to several Faith Societies. You can find more information and contact details here: <https://www.bath.ac.uk/professional-services/chaplaincy>

CRUSE Bereavement Counselling

They help people through one of the most painful times in life – with bereavement support and information: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-support/>

Volunteers are trained in all types of bereavement and can help you make sense of how you're feeling right now. Phone: 0808 808 1677 or speak via CruseChat

Sue Ryder Hospice online support

Free counselling and professional support open to all UK residents over 18.

Website: www.sueryder.org/onlinesupport

Samaritans

Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide.

Phone: 116 123 www.samaritans.org

Other support organisations you could contact include:

[At a Loss](#)

[The Good Grief Trust](#)

[Marie Curie](#)

[The Loss Foundation.](#)

Self help tools and techniques

Things that can help with intense or difficult emotions.

The research tells us very convincingly that if we keep trying to block or bottle up unwanted emotions or memories, this is only likely to increase our distress.

It is human to want to avoid pain, helping ourselves to tolerate and accept difficult emotions is likely to serve us better though.

The 'volume' / 'weight' of emotions tends to reduce somewhat if we can stay grounded, stable and anchored, here are some tools and techniques that have been found to be helpful.

The 54321 grounding exercise

Grounding exercises are a simple yet useful technique to use to bring you back to the present and help you to realise you are safe and in control.

1. The first step is to look around the space you are in and name five things that you can see around you. For instance, a painting on the wall or a car. Think about how that thing looks to you or what is it that you like or don't like about it.
2. The second step is to focus on four things that you can feel. Suppose that you notice how the wind is blowing through your hair or how the sun feels on your skin. It can be helpful to say these things out loud, such as 'I can feel the chair that I am sitting on'
3. The third step is to name three things that you can hear around you. For example, you may become aware of the traffic in the background or some birds chirping in a nearby tree.
4. The fourth step is to notice two things that you can smell around you right now. To illustrate, you may notice the smell of grass or perhaps the smell of perfume wafting around. If you can't smell anything around you, then it can be helpful to name two or three smells that you like such as fresh baked bread or a flower.
5. The fifth step is to focus on one thing that you can taste. If you can't taste anything, then instead you can choose to name a taste that you like.

Giving our sorrow words

Studies have found that writing about traumatic, stressful, or emotional events can improve physical and mental health. Writing about loss can also allow us to make meaning from something we are struggling to come to terms with. Talking about your loss and telling the story of your loss and grief can help to process what has happened.

As your mind tries to make sense of your loss, you may feel a need and even an urgency to tell your story and make sense of what has happened. This can be an important way of processing all the emotions that you are feeling.

If you don't feel that you've had a proper chance to speak about what happened then you might find it helpful to write your story from your perspective, as if you are telling someone about what happened.

Finding creative ways of expressing what's going on inside is crucial to moving through, processing, and integrating grief and trauma. The definition of "expression" here is best understood in terms of pressing or squeezing – moving the pain, hurt and complicated feelings through and out. When we do this, we find space for new things to move in.

How to grieve mindfully

1. Accept your feelings: Allow yourself to feel what you feel at any given moment, with a sense of self-compassion, and without judgment.
2. Express your feelings: Just as important as accepting your feelings is expressing them in a way that is helpful to you. Journaling, talking about the experience, scrapbooking, or dancing, for example, are helpful ways to process grief instead of allowing the feelings to stay stuck.
3. Continue to take care of yourself and others: Living life while grieving often feels like scaling a mountain. Grieving takes energy and can often feel draining. As much as possible during this tough time, continue to eat well, exercise, and maintain wellness practices.

Mindful Breathing

This can be done anywhere at any time and without anyone realising you are doing it. Mindful breathing involves focusing your attention on your body as breath enters and exits. This exercise is helpful for calming your mind and body, as well as alleviating anxiety.

Mindful Walking

This is valuable as it also includes physical activity which can be beneficial for mood and mental health. A nature walk can also provide an opportunity to reflect on the natural cycle of life and death and to experience the beauty in everything around us.

Individual Wellbeing Action Plan (I-WAP)

how to support your wellbeing at work

Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed for anyone who would like to learn more about how to use individual Wellbeing Action Plans (I-WAPs) to support and promote their mental health and wellbeing. You could be:

- currently experiencing a mental health problem and want to find out how a I-WAP can help you;
- currently well and interested in using the I-WAP as a proactive tool to map out what needs to be in place for you to be mentally well at work.

What is a Wellbeing Action Plan (I-WAP) and how can it help me?

An I- WAP is a personalised, practical tool we can all use – whether we have a mental health concern or not – to help us identify what keeps us well at work, what causes us to become unwell, and how to address a mental health problem at work should you be experiencing one.

It also offers the opportunity to open up a dialogue with your manager, supervisor or other person, in order for them to better understand your needs and experiences and ultimately better support your mental health, which in turn leads to greater productivity, better performance and increased job satisfaction.

We all have mental health just as we all have physical health, and this WAP has been designed to support us all to manage our mental health.

WAPs are also particularly helpful during the return to work process if you have been off work due to a mental health problem, as they provide a structure for conversations around what support will help you and what reasonable adjustments might be useful to discuss and consider with your manager.

Individual Wellbeing Action Plan template

An I-WAP reminds us what we need to do to stay well at work and details what our line managers can do to support us. It also helps us develop an awareness of our working style, stress triggers and responses, and enables us to communicate these.

1. What helps you stay mentally healthy at work?

(For example, taking an adequate lunch break away from your desk, getting some exercise before or after work, light and space in the office, opportunities to get to know colleagues)

2. What can your manager do to proactively support you to stay mentally healthy at work?

(For example, regular feedback and catch-ups, flexible working patterns, explaining wider organisational developments)

3. Are there any situations at work that can trigger poor mental health for you?

(e.g. conflict at work, organisational change, tight deadlines, something not going to plan)

4. How might experiencing poor mental health impact on your work?

(For example, you may find it difficult to make decisions, struggle to prioritise work tasks, difficulty with concentration, drowsiness, confusion, headaches)

5. Are there any early warning signs that we might notice when you are starting to experience poor mental health?

(For example, changes in normal working patterns, withdrawing from colleagues)

6. What could be put in place to minimise triggers or help manage the impact?

(For example, extra catch-up time with your manager, guidance on prioritising workload, flexible working patterns, consider reasonable adjustments)

7. Are there elements of your individual working style or temperament that it is worth your manager being aware of?

(For example, a preference for more face to face or more email contact)

8. If we notice early warning signs that you are experiencing poor mental health - what should we do?

(For example, talk to you discreetly about it, contact someone that you have specified)

9. What steps can you take if you start to experience poor mental health at work? Is there anything we need to do to facilitate them?

(For example, you might like to take a break from your desk and go for a short walk, or ask your line manager for support)

10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Guide for Managers

How to support the mental wellbeing of your team members

For the purpose of clarity, when ‘mental health and wellbeing’ is referred to in this guide, it is used in the broadest possible sense.

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. How we feel can vary from good mental wellbeing to difficult feelings and emotions, to severe mental health problems.

What is an Individual Wellbeing Action Plan (I-WAP) and how does it benefit managers?

As a manager, encouraging your team to draw up an I-WAP gives them ownership of the practical steps needed to help them stay well at work or manage a mental health problem. It also opens up a dialogue between you and your team member, to help you better understand their needs and experiences and therefore better support their wellbeing. This in turn can lead to greater productivity, better performance and increased job satisfaction.

I-WAPs are also particularly helpful during the return to work process, when someone has been off work due to a mental health problem, as they provide a structure for conversations around what support will help and what reasonable adjustments might be useful to consider.

What should a I-WAP cover?

- approaches the individual can adopt to support their mental wellbeing
- early warning signs of poor mental health to look out for
- any workplace triggers for poor mental health or stress
- potential impact of poor mental health on performance, if any
- what support they need from you as their manager
- actions and positive steps you will both take if they are experiencing stress or poor mental health
- an agreed time to review the I-WAP and any support measures which are in place anything else that they feel would be useful in supporting their mental health

The WAP is not legally binding, but is intended as an agreement between you and your team member in order to promote their wellbeing or address any existing mental health needs, including any adjustments they may wish to discuss.

Supporting your team members to develop a I-WAP

As a manager, you will be a key support in encouraging your team members to develop their I-WAP.

You could start by asking your team member to have a go at completing the I-WAP, then scheduling some time to discuss this with you and finalise it based on these discussions.

Take a coaching approach

Ask the person you are supporting to think about:

- what they are like when they are feeling well and flourishing at work
- what a work environment that promotes good mental wellbeing looks like for them
- what helps maintain their mental wellbeing
- what coping strategies they already use for dealing with poor mental health and why these have been effective
- how they've addressed similar challenges in the past
- what hasn't worked for them in the past and why they think this might be

Remember, you may not be able to agree to all suggestions, consideration needs to be given to the impact of any requests on the wider team. You can get further information and support from your HR business partner or advisor.

Once the I-WAP has been drawn up, factor in some time during your catch-ups or 1-to-1's to review the I-WAP and make any necessary changes. It is most effective when treated as a live, flexible document, so a regular 'feedback loop' with your team member to assess what is and isn't working is an important part of the process.

