



What is grief?

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My grief says that I dared to love, that I allowed another to enter the very core of my being and find a home in my heart. Grief is akin to praise; it is how the soul recounts the depth to which someone has touched our lives. To love is to accept the rites of grief.

— Francis Weller

[The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief](#)



Loss is an inevitable part of life

Grief is not limited to the loss of a loved one—it can arise from many forms of loss, each carrying its own emotional weight and impact on our well-being. It can emerge in response to life changes such as:

- Companionship
- Health
- Identity
- Security/safety
- The state of our world and planet

These diverse experiences reflect how grief affects us both individually and collectively. Collective grief, for example, is the shared sorrow felt by a community or society, amplifying the need for shared understanding and support. In many cultures, grief is embraced through rituals, expressions, and traditions that honour the vastness of this emotion. These practices can teach us how to process loss meaningfully. In contrast, modern society often encourages us to suppress or sideline grief, despite its being a natural and necessary part of the human experience.

We invite a different approach: one that embraces collective expression and acknowledges the complexity of grief. By creating space to adjust to new realities and navigate layered emotions, we can learn to live with grief rather than resist it.

Ultimately, grief is about reconciling the gap between what we hoped for or expected and the reality we face. Together, we can find ways to move forward with compassion, resilience, and connection.

Different types of loss that can lead to feelings of grief



Loss of companionship:

The end of a relationship, whether through divorce, bereavement, separation, or the loss of a close friendship, can lead to grief.

This type of grief stems not only from missing the person but also from losing shared dreams, living space, support, and companionship that came with the relationship.



Health challenges

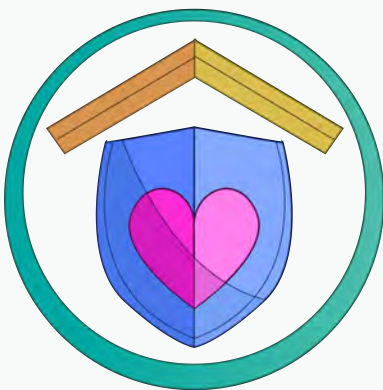
When someone experiences a significant change in their health, such as a chronic illness or pain, disability or injury, they may grieve the loss of their physical abilities or previous state of well-being. This type of grief involves adjusting to new limitations and often mourning the life they had before.

Different types of loss that can lead to feelings of grief



Shifts in identity:

Major life transitions can sometimes make children and young people feel like they've lost a part of who they are. Changes like starting a new school, moving to a different home, losing a close friendship, or facing changes in their family—such as a new sibling—can leave them feeling unsure of themselves. Grieving these changes involves adjusting to a new sense of identity and can be a confusing and emotional process for young people.



Loss of security or safety:

Financial hardship, loss of employment, or other life events that lead to insecurity can cause grief. The stability that one once relied on may be gone, and the uncertainty about the future can bring about anxiety and sadness.

Different types of loss that can lead to feelings of grief



Things not going to plan:

Grief can arise when life doesn't go as planned, such as missed opportunities, unrealised dreams, or major setbacks. This type of grief can involve mourning the loss of hoped-for outcomes and coming to terms with a new reality.



Concerns about the state of the planet:

Many people experience grief related to the state of the environment, sometimes called "eco-grief" or "climate grief." This arises from feelings of loss related to environmental destruction, species extinction, and climate change, leading to a sense of sadness, helplessness and even "eco anxiety".

Different types of loss that can lead to feelings of grief

Concerns about the state of the world:



People may grieve in response to global and communal events that disrupt a sense of peace, security, or optimism for the future. These events—such as war, injustice, social unrest, global inequalities, pandemics like Covid-19, natural disasters, terror attacks, mass shootings, or even the death of a public figure like Princess Diana—can evoke profound feelings of grief, sadness, and anger. When a community, nation, or society experiences a shared sense of loss around such events, this collective grief can become a powerful, unifying, yet challenging force to navigate.

Further learning:

[Francis Weller: The Sacred work of grief](#)

[Grief tending](#)

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Joanna Macy writes that until we can grieve for our planet we cannot love it—grieving is a sign of spiritual health. But it is not enough to weep for our lost landscapes; we have to put our hands in the earth to make ourselves whole again. Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair.

— Robin Wall Kimmerer

[Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants](#)



What is grief?

Grief is an emotional response to loss and encompasses a wide range of feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. It can sometimes feel like a rollercoaster due to the ups and downs of emotions—even years later. This is especially true for young people, whose understanding of loss often evolves as they grow.

It is important to remember:

- There is no 'right way' to grieve
- Grief is NOT a linear journey
- Grief does not have a timeline
- Everyone's grief is unique and personal

For students, grief can manifest in many ways, and it's not always obvious. Teachers might observe the following emotional, behavioural, physical, cognitive and developmental changes:

Emotional responses:

- Sudden mood swings, anger, sadness, or withdrawal
- Difficulty expressing or even understanding their emotions



What is grief? (continued)

Behavioural changes:

- Acting out or becoming disruptive in class
- Excessive quietness or reluctance to participate
- Changes in social interaction with peers

Physical reactions:

- Fatigue, headaches, or stomachaches
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating

Cognitive and developmental changes:

- Trouble focusing, forgetfulness, or a decline in academic performance
- Asking repetitive or unexpected questions about death or loss, reflecting their developmental understanding

If you'd like guidance about supporting grieving students, please see our strategies for teachers guide by following this [link](#).



Puddling jumping

Children experience and express grief differently from adults. One key difference is how they navigate their emotions—often moving in and out of intense feelings quickly, much like jumping in and out of puddles.

A child might appear deeply sad or withdrawn one moment and then suddenly shift to playing, laughing, or focusing on something unrelated the next. This isn't a sign that they are "over" their grief; rather, it's a natural coping mechanism. By processing their grief in smaller, manageable doses, children give their developing minds and emotions a break from the overwhelming intensity of loss.

Recognising this behaviour helps you meet grieving children where they are and provide the reassurance they need to navigate their grief in a healthy, individualised way.

Short video about Puddle jumping:

[Click here to view in Youtube](#)



Complicated/Prolonged grief

Complicated Grief occurs when someone becomes "stuck" in their grieving process for an extended period. It involves intense, long-lasting symptoms that deeply impact mental health and interfere with daily life.

This prolonged form of grief disrupts a person's ability to adjust to life after a significant bereavement, often intensifying over time rather than diminishing.

Causes of Complicated Grief:

Several factors can contribute to Complicated Grief, including:

- **Sudden or traumatic loss:** Unexpected losses can disrupt the grieving process.
- **Lack of support:** Feeling isolated or unsupported during grief can make it harder to cope.
- **Close or dependent relationship to the person who has died:** The more central the deceased was to someone's life, the harder it may be to adjust.
- **Unresolved past losses:** Previous grief that hasn't been processed can resurface.
- **Multiple losses:** Experiencing several losses at once or in succession can overwhelm a person's capacity to grieve.

These factors can interfere with the natural adjustment to life without the loved one, prolonging and intensifying grief.

Complicated/Prolonged grief

Common signs of Complicated Grief include:

- Persistent yearning or longing for the person they have lost
- Difficulty accepting the reality of the loss
- Constantly ruminating on the circumstances of the death
- Feeling detached from reality or disconnected from others
- A pervasive sense of emptiness or numbness
- Overwhelming hopelessness or inability to envision a future

Steps to address Complicated Grief:

If you think you or someone you know may be experiencing Complicated Grief, here are some steps to take:

- **Acknowledge your experience:** Recognise that what you are feeling may be Complicated Grief. Naming it is the first step toward healing.
- **Practice self-compassion:** Accept where you are without judgement. It's okay to feel stuck, and it's also okay to take small steps to move forward.
- **Reach out to your GP:** Consult your doctor for support with both mental and physical health concerns.
- **Find professional help:** A counsellor or therapist can provide tools and guidance to process grief.

Complicated/Prolonged grief

- **Lean on loved ones:** Ask someone you trust to help with small daily tasks, such as establishing a routine, getting outside, or engaging in activities that promote mental health and well-being.

Taking even small steps toward support can make a meaningful difference in managing Complicated Grief.

Activities that can strengthen your mental health and wellbeing:

Take notice

Remember the simple things that give you joy.

Be active

Do what you can.
Enjoy what you do.
Move your mood.

Connect

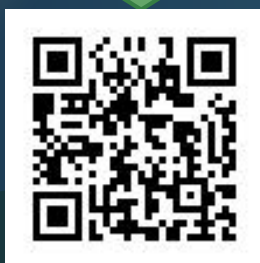
Talk & Listen.
Be there.
Feel connected

Keep learning

Embrace new experiences.
See opportunities.
Surprise yourself.

Give

Your time.
Your words.
Your presence.



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