



What is grief?

Grief is our natural response to loss. It is the emotional suffering we experience when someone or something we love is taken away.

While grief is most commonly associated with the loss of a loved one, any loss can cause us to experience grief. This may include losses such as the death of a pet, suffering a miscarriage, experiencing divorce, relationship breakdown, children leaving home, loss of our health, loss of a job or retirement.

The more significant the loss, the more intense our grief is likely to be. Grieving is a normal part of life and there is no 'right' way to grieve.

A few facts about grief

Grief is a normal, natural and painful emotional reaction to loss

Grief is hard work – it takes a toll emotionally and physically and requires more energy than most of us expect

There is no predictable way to grieve – we are all different and we all grieve in different ways

There is no right or wrong time frame for grieving – each of us will take different amounts of time

Signs and symptoms

Grief has a range of symptoms and any or all are part of the grieving process. It is expressed in many different ways and can impact our physical health, our emotions, our thoughts and behaviour, and our relationships with others. Often we feel overwhelmed, numb and isolated.

Physical

- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Change in appetite / weight
- Restlessness and difficulty sleeping
- Tightness in the throat
- Headaches, nausea, chest pain

Emotional

- Sadness
- Anger or resentment
- Guilt
- Loneliness
- Abandonment and meaninglessness
- Difficulty thinking about anything else

Social

- Lacking initiative
- Avoiding others
- Feeling withdrawn
- Wanting to be alone
- Overly sensitive
- Lack of interest in others / activities

Behavioural

- Dreaming about the person
- Avoiding talking about your loss to help others feel comfortable
- The need to tell the story of your loved one's death or of your loss
- Forgetfulness or difficulty concentrating



Help yourself

When you grieve, try not to worry too much about what is normal. We are all different and it is important you allow yourself to grieve in your own way.

The following strategies will assist you to work through your grief.

- 1 BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF**
 - go through your mourning at your own pace and don't compare yourself to others. Accept your feelings – it is normal to experience strong emotions.
- 2 RECOGNISE YOU ARE HURTING**
 - don't try to ignore or hide the pain and allow yourself to grieve.
- 3 ASK FOR AND ACCEPT HELP**
 - either from those you trust or from a professional. Talking to others helps.
- 4 USE RELAXATION STRATEGIES**
 - try slow breathing, listening to soothing music, visualisation, step outside for a walk, read a book or watch a movie.
- 5 LOOK AFTER YOURSELF**
 - regular exercise, a healthy diet and a good sleep routine will have a positive impact. Sleep is particularly important while you are grieving.
- 6 POSTPONE MAJOR DECISIONS IF YOU CAN**
 - now is not the ideal time to make key decisions.
- 7 BE KIND TO YOURSELF**
 - understand that grieving is a normal and important part of moving forward. Some days will be easier than others.
- 8 PLAN FOR DAYS THAT MAY BE DIFFICULT**
 - the first Christmas, birthday, anniversary can be challenging so plan in advance to have a way to work through these times.
- 9 ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL HAPPY**
 - grieving does not mean you can't smile or enjoy life. Allow yourself moments of joy without guilt.
- 10 CREATE YOUR OWN MEMORIES**
 - find your own way to express your feelings. It might be creating a photo album, writing a story or song about them or creating some form of art.

NEED ASSISTANCE?

If you need assistance to understand or manage grief there is plenty of support available. Your GP is a good starting point and at Benestar® we're always here to help. Call us at 0800 360 364 or email counsellingsupportnz@benestar.com.