

Grief affects every part of us – our thoughts, feelings, body, spirit, and relationships with others and we often don't know how to manage its impact.

This leaflet offers some basic information about grief and loss. It suggests ways to cope with it or to support others dealing with grief.

Grief is a normal part of life and affects us all

It's normal to feel grief when we lose someone or something of value to us.

Having to deal with grief changes us, and it can bring wisdom and insights. We can learn more about what really matters and what's not so important to us.

We can feel grief when we lose:

- People – through death, a relationship break-up or because a relationship changes
- Health – through illness or accident
- Things we own – through accident, theft or disaster
- Places – by moving schools, house, or city/country
- Our place in the world – through being made redundant, losing a place on a team, changed roles of sense of identity
- Pets – loss or death of a loved pet.

Grief feelings

Grief can cause a range of different feelings and responses. These will come and go, and you may feel only some of them:

- **Shock/disbelief** – You feel in a daze, numb, empty. It can take a while for what has happened to sink in. You don't want to believe it's true.
- **Sadness** – You want to cry. It helps to let these feelings out when you feel them, rather than pushing them away. Afterwards you usually feel better and have a sense of relief.
- **Anger/blame/guilt** – You feel angry or want to blame yourself or others – perhaps even the person who has died. Recognising these feelings allows you look for more positive ways to respond.
- **Yearning** – There is a gap in your life. You understand that you can't have things the way they were, but you may think about and still long for the things you have lost.
- **Helplessness** – You feel anxious because you suddenly have less control over your feelings – tears want to spill out at any time. This will pass over time.
- **Physical discomfort** – You may feel unwell, have headaches or stomach aches, or get colds easily. You may feel tired a lot or feel more or less hungry.

How to cope – take time to grieve

We all grieve in our own way, in our own time. There is no 'right' way. It can come in waves, sometimes when you're not expecting it. Some of these ideas may help during these times:

Stay connected to family, whānau, friends and other important to you. Allow them to support you. Talk about how you are feeling.

Look through photos. Having precious photos and mementos helps you stay connected to who or what you have lost. This can intensify your feelings for a while, so make sure you are somewhere you feel comfortable showing your emotions.

Write a letter to the person or thing you've lost. Include whatever you want – no one else ever has to see it. Write about the memories you treasure – the good, the bad, the funny, the sad and the things you will miss.

Be kind to yourself. Grieving can be exhausting. Doing some 'caring for yourself' things may help like listening to your favourite music or going for a walk

Choose whatever suits you. If nothing seems to be helping, ask for support.



“I wake up in the morning and pretend it's just been a bad dream”

“I felt like I was going crazy. I couldn't stop thinking about it.”

“I can't stop crying. Every part of me hurts.”

“I feel like I have run a marathon – I am so exhausted.”

“I felt better after I talked to my best friend.”

It's okay to ask for support

Grief can be hard to manage. If you have lost someone or something that was very important to you, you may feel grief for a long time. Letting people know you need help, and accepting support when offered, can be important when working through your grief.

Some people can find themselves reliving what has happened. If flashbacks or nightmares affect your daily life, tell your doctor or counsellor or someone else that you trust.

There may be times you feel you just can't cope with it, don't know how you're going to carry on, or don't want to. It will take time to come to terms with what has happened. Look back at the ideas suggested in the previous section. Maybe try another one or repeat one that worked last time you felt like this.

If over time you feel nothing is working and you can't see a way through your grief, you may need professional support (like counselling).

Feeling depressed

Sometimes grief can lead to depression. You may:

- feel hopeless, angry, or miserable all the time
- have trouble concentrating or making decisions
- find you don't enjoy anything anymore
- have thoughts about death or harming yourself.

If these thoughts and feelings go on, it's important to get professional help. (Refer to the back page of this booklet.)

Be gentle on yourself. Give yourself time. Take it easy.

Where to go for help

There are people and services available to provide or help you find extra support when you need it.

Most are free and have trained people who want to help. These include 24 hour helplines and websites:

- Phone/txt 1737 for mental health support & advice
- The Depression Helpline (0800 111 757)
- Healthline (0800 611 116)
- Lifeline (0800 543 354)
- Samaritans (0800 726 666)
- Youthline (0800 376 633)
- www.thelowdown.co.nz (for young people)
- www.depression.org.nz (for adults)
- www.skylight.org.nz (grief, loss and trauma support and information for all ages)

Helping a friend, family or whānau member who is grieving

It can be a help just to **be around**. Let the person who is grieving know that you understand they are going through a hard time and you will be there if they want to talk or just hang out. Talk to them about the ideas you've read in this booklet that might help with their grief.

It can be helpful to offer practical support like cooking meals, helping with housework, childcare, or accompanying the grieving person to meetings and appointments.



Coping with Grief and Loss