

Grief and loss



Grief is a natural human response to loss, and there's no 'right' or 'wrong' way to grieve, no rules, and no time limit.

Grief is the emotional pain you feel after events like:

- the death of a loved one
- your parents splitting up
- the death of a pet
- losing a friendship
- moving away from friends and family
- a traumatic experience
- a relationship breakup
- losing a cherished dream

The feelings you can experience

Often people experience a roller coaster of different feelings that can come and go with intensity.

Common emotions include:

- shock
- disbelief or confusion
- anger and frustration
- hurt
- a longing feeling
- physical pain
- nausea
- emptiness
- deep sadness
- disconnection
- remorse
- fear
- anxiety

- numbness
- relief

Grief can affect you:

- **emotionally** – you may experience many intense and overwhelming feelings
 - **physically** – you might feel unwell and tired, or find it hard to sleep or eat
 - **mentally** – you may feel confused and find it hard to concentrate
 - **socially** – you may feel isolated or disconnected from others
 - **spiritually** – you might find yourself thinking about and discussing spiritual aspects of life during a time of grief
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How can you cope with these feelings?

Sometimes feelings can be powerful, overwhelming, and hard to cope with. At first, you may wonder if you'll ever feel okay again – even doing normal day-to-day activities like making breakfast, talking to people, and going to school might feel really hard. Some people find they need some time out from their normal timetable, while others find it comforting to stick to their routine.

Here are some ideas to help you get through the tough times:

- **Connect with friends and family and share your thoughts, feelings and memories** – If someone in your whānau has died, sharing your memories and how you're feeling can be a really good way for family and friends to support each other.
- **Talk to others** – Talking to others about what you're going through and how you're feeling is also important. This lets people know what you need, and what they can do to support you – whether you need space or company, to talk about what has happened, or be distracted for a while.
- **People want to help** – If people know what you're going through, how you're feeling, and what you need, they're more likely to be understanding and able to help you. However, if it feels as though talking to those around you is too difficult at the moment, remember you can call us at 0800 What's Up. We're here to listen, you don't have to deal with anything on your own – just pick up the phone and give us a call.
- **If you're not coping well at school ask for help** – You can ask what kind of support or help your school can offer, or you may want to take time out or get extensions for projects. Try and find a way to take the pressure off – the less stress you have while you're grieving, the better.
- **Express yourself creatively** – It can really help to find other ways to let your feelings out. Some people do this by writing in a journal or blogging, drawing, painting, singing, dancing, or listening to music. Activities like these, that bring relaxation as well as an opportunity for emotional expression, can be really helpful in a time of grief. Maybe try a few things and find what works for you.
- **Spend some time outdoors** – Take long walks in nature with friends or family, go for a bike ride, to the park, or to the beach, or sit out in the garden and enjoy the quiet time to reflect and appreciate the natural world. This can be especially good if you're feeling irritated or need time out.

- **Look after your health** – It can be easy to forget the basics when you're hurting, but it's super important that you look after yourself. Do physical things like playing sport, running, swimming, skating, or whatever you enjoy! Make sure you eat healthily, don't skip meals, and get enough sleep. These things can really make a big difference to how you feel.
- **Be kind to yourself and give yourself time** – Grief can last longer than you might think. If you've experienced a big loss, you may find it hard for a long time, and the feelings may continue to come back from time to time for the rest of your life, but that's okay. A big loss is something that people begin to get used to and accept, rather than get over. Sometimes people worry if they feel grief for a long time after a person has died, or they feel as though they *should* be 'over it'. But it's normal for feelings to come and go, so give yourself permission to feel whatever you're feeling and take your time. You don't have to 'get over it' or forget about the person you've lost – they can always hold a special place in your heart.

Remember, in time, it will get easier!

Grieving is hard and it takes a lot of time and courage to deal with – there might be good days, there might be bad days. Feelings of sadness and missing someone may never go away completely, but it will get easier and less intense with time. You may find it comforting to know that many young people who experience loss, although it's really hard, when they do begin to feel okay again they often say they feel stronger emotionally and have gained a greater understanding of what's important to them.
