

WHAT IS GRIEF AND LOSS?

Everyone's experience of grief and loss differs, and it is important that we understand there is no right or wrong way to grieve.

It can help though to share your experiences with others and discuss your emotions as you come to terms with your loss.

Grief is the response we have to the loss of someone or something important in our lives.

The loss may be of a loved-one, a colleague, a pet, or a job; anything that held meaning but which is suddenly gone from our lives. It is important to remember that grief does not follow a set timeline and that different people process their feelings in different ways and at a different pace.

The first few days after a loss

In the aftermath of a loss, the first few days and weeks are often the hardest. You may experience shock, disbelief or anger that the loss has occurred. Some people talk of feeling numb and that they end up on "autopilot" as a coping mechanism during these difficult first few days.

After the initial period of shock, people will go through the grieving process in different ways, often depending on social, cultural and personal factors.

These emotions include anger, fear, guilt, sadness, anxiety, and the feeling of being overwhelmed. These feelings are not constant or experienced in a particular order, and may be triggered by various stimuli, like memories, conversations or scenarios.

Looking after yourself while grieving

- 1. Allow yourself time to grieve.** There is no "quick fix" for grief.
- 2. Acknowledge your feelings.** Remember that you will experience a range of emotions during the grieving process and that they will come and go as time moves on.
- 3. Talk about how you're feeling.** Reach out to people you trust. They will understand what you're going through and want to help.
- 4. Honour who or what you've lost.** Use photos, a journal or a memorial to mark the importance of your loss and your emotional response.
- 5. Take care of your physical and mental health.** Stay active, eat well and reach out for support.

Looking after someone else who is grieving

- 1. Acknowledge their loss.** Allow them to talk about it with you openly and without judgment.
- 2. Offer your comfort and support.** Ask them what you can do to help. The answer may be 'nothing', but it's important they know you are there for them.
- 3. Give them time.** Remember that grief doesn't run on a set timeline. It may take years for them to process their sense of loss.
- 4. Help them access external support services.** Professional counselling services are available that specialise in helping people who are going through grief and loss. If it's appropriate, offer to put them in touch with someone.

