

Different Types of Grief

Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. You can grieve anything you value, and there is no wrong or right way to grieve. Your grief does not need to be labelled or defined; however, some people find it helpful to understand their grief through a label or category.

Acute Grief

Acute grief is often experienced in weeks and months after loss. Acute grief is an intense period where you may feel:

- Extreme sadness
- Intense yearning
- Shock and numbness
- Deep emotional distress
- Frequent thoughts about who or what you have lost
- Decreased interest in ongoing activities
- Confusion and brain fog
- Physical pain, such as headaches or stomach aches
- Trouble sleeping or eating

Anticipatory Grief (also known as Pre-Loss Grief)

Anticipatory grief is the grief experienced before a loss. For example, you might experience anticipatory grief if you or someone you care about receives a life-limiting diagnosis. Like any form of grief, there is no set time frame for anticipatory grief. Grieving in anticipation may lessen the intensity of your grief post loss as you have spent time grieving in the lead up to loss.

Primary & Secondary Loss

A primary loss is the central loss. For example, the loss of a person or a relationship. A secondary loss is the loss you experience because of the primary loss. For example, if your person dies, you are grieving them, but you might also grieve your imagined future, who you were when you were with them, or the things you used to do together. These are secondary losses, and they will continue to arise as we navigate life after loss.

Disenfranchised Grief

Disenfranchised grief is the experience of feeling that you are not entitled to your grief. For example, your colleagues might dismiss your grief because you are grieving the loss of an animal as opposed to a person. Or perhaps your family did not support your relationship, and when it ended, they did not acknowledge or support your grief.

Disenfranchised grief can also be the result of viewing grief through a hierarchy, with only some losses being worthy of grieving. For example, "I don't know why I am so upset, I wasn't that close to them" or "don't worry about me, your loss is so much worse than mine".

Collective Grief

Collective grief is the shared experience of loss felt by a group, community, culture or country following a significant event such as a natural disaster, pandemic, war, tragedy or public death. It can affect people emotionally, physically and socially, even when they did not know those directly impacted. Collective grief often brings people together through shared mourning, rituals, storytelling, and acts of support.

Complex Grief

For some people, their grief will be challenging and complex. There are many factors that can cause grief to become complex.

Some of these factors include:

- A loss that was experienced as traumatic.
- Pre-existing mental or physical health conditions.
- Stressful life circumstances, such as housing or financial instability.
- Social isolation.
- A close relationship with the deceased.

When grief doesn't ease

If you find that your grief remains intense, overwhelming, and persistent, and is preventing you from living your life in the way you would like, it can be helpful to seek specialist grief support. You can start by speaking to your GP or exploring the supports listed below.

Finding what helps

Everyone grieves differently, and different things will help different people at different times. A good place to start is returning to things that have supported you in the past, while gently exploring new ways to care for yourself.

- Below are some suggestions for caring for yourself through grief. You don't need to do everything on this list, start small, and remember that small actions can make a big difference over time.
- Support your body with rest, nourishment, and gentle movement where possible.
- Express your thoughts and feelings through writing, creativity, mindfulness, or talking with someone you trust.
- Lean on safe and supportive people, communities, or grief support forums for connection.
- Connect with spiritual, cultural, or personal practices that support you.

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SUPPORT

- Grief and loss support can be accessed through SANE's RecoveryClub. To join RecoveryClub, register through the [SANE website](#).
- The grief and loss [space on the SANE forums](#) gives another safe opportunity to share, remember and find support with others navigating loss.
- Speak to your GP about accessing your local grief or bereavement service.

[National Association for Loss and Grief](#)

Access up to 12 free grief support sessions with a trained volunteer.

1300 474 33

[Red Nose](#)

Free support for anyone grieving the sudden loss of a child or young person.

1300 308 307

Suicide Bereavement

[StandBy](#)

Free grief support for those bereaved by suicide.

1300 727 247

[Thirrili](#)

Free grief support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders bereaved by suicide.

1800 805 801

RESOURCES

Other useful Factsheets on this topic are available on the SANE website:

- Understanding Grief & Finding What Helps
- 5 Strategies for Navigating Life After Loss
- How to Support Someone Who is Grieving

Other resources:

- [What Is Your Grief?](#) – a helpful online resource for learning more about grief and loss.
- [This Is Grief](#) – a gentle guide for individuals & families.