

Grieving the Loss of a Relationship

The end of a relationship can bring with it deep grief, even when the relationship was complicated, unhealthy or expected to end.

Your grief is unique

There are many factors that can influence how we grieve, including our age, personality, cultural background, physical and mental health, past experiences of loss, sense of safety and support, as well as the way the loss occurred. Everyone will grieve differently, and there is no wrong or right way to grieve. You can grieve a relationship in a similar way that you might grieve a person's life.

Common grief experiences include:

- Feeling lost or disoriented
- A loss of identity
- Yearning for the person or the relationship
- Idealising the past
- Trouble with sleeping or eating
- Exhaustion and brain fog
- Emotional overwhelm
- Fear or anxiety
- Obsessively checking social media
- Not wanting to be around other people
- Feeling unable to be alone

You can grieve a relationship that was complicated

A relationship doesn't have to have been a good relationship for you to grieve it. Relationships are rarely completely good or completely bad.

For example:

- If you are estranged from a parent, you might grieve the kind of parent and child relationship you wanted to have.
- If you have left an abusive partner, you might grieve the good times and the future you had imagined with them.
- If you are grieving a romantic love that was not reciprocated, you might grieve the relationship you wished you'd had.

Even if the relationship ending was expected or necessary, it can still feel like the ground has shifted beneath you. That's because relationships give us structure, identity, purpose, and connection.

Understanding attachment

Attachment is the emotional bond we form with important people in our lives. These relationships can become part of how we experience safety, connection, and belonging, which is why the loss of a relationship can feel so emotionally and physically overwhelming.

After a relationship ends, you may find yourself:

- constantly thinking about the person
- wanting contact or reassurance
- feeling rejected or abandoned
- struggling to imagine life without them.

Some people describe this experience as 'withdrawal' – your body is craving all the feel-good chemicals that connection creates. These reactions are a normal response to attachment and loss, not a sign that something is wrong with you. Over time, the intensity of these feelings will often soften. If you find they don't, it can be helpful to seek support using one of the services listed below.

Let yourself grieve

A lot of people think grief is just sadness, but there are many emotions with grief. You can also feel multiple emotions at the same time. For example, you might feel relieved that the relationship is over, angry at how it ended, and sad that you can no longer speak to them.

Try not to judge your feelings; all feelings are allowed in grief. We cannot control what we feel, but we can control how we respond to our feelings. You can find more information on what helps here.

If your relationship was unsafe:

When leaving an abusive or violent relationship, you might feel conflicting emotions – fear, relief, guilt, anger, sadness or confusion. If you are leaving an unsafe relationship it is likely you are carrying both grief and trauma. It can be helpful to speak to someone about these feelings. 1800 RESPECT is a free national support service and a great place to start if you don't know who to talk to.

- 1800 RESPECT: 1800 737 732 – National Sexual Assault, Domestic & Family Violence Counselling Service

When grief doesn't ease

If you find that your grief remains persistent, overwhelming and debilitating, 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.

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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

[Relationships Australia](#)

Relationship and grief counselling available for a fee.

1300 364 277

RESOURCES

SANE Factsheets:

- 5 Strategies for Navigating Life After Loss
- Understanding Grief & Finding What Helps

Other resources:

- [How your attachment style can impact your relationship](#)
– Relationships Australia