

When you are Grieving...

here
for
you

Victim Support is here to support you, your family, whānau and friends.

We hope you will find this information helpful.

Call us on 0800 842 846 to be connected with a Support Worker who can provide practical help and information, emotional support, and referral to other services at this difficult time. We're available 24/7.

What is Grief?

Grief is a normal reaction to any significant changes and losses we experience.

It's a process that helps us to gradually adjust to what's happened, so we can begin to move forward again. Grief reactions can come after we have had property taken or damaged, when someone we love has been harmed, when we've been harmed ourselves, or when we become bereaved.

Victims and witnesses of crime, trauma or disaster will often find themselves grieving for how things were before, and for what they have lost. The grief experience can be full on, intense and unpredictable for a while. It can feel as up and down as a roller coaster. Thoughts and emotions can sometimes be strong and hard to handle. Some people even wonder if they're going crazy.

Knowing the sorts of things to expect during grief can be helpful, as well as some ways to cope.

There are no right or wrong ways to grieve and no rules to follow. Everyone does it differently, because we're all different. Your grief experience will be like your fingerprint – unique to you.

“I was starting to do okay and then got swamped by some big grief waves. It turns out my grief has its own agenda, but it is helping me get my head around what's happened. I'm thinking now it'll just take the time it needs to take.

Kara

CONTACT

Victim Support

Get Help: 0800 VICTIM (0800 842 846)
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Victim Support
Manaaki Tangata





Grief Reactions

Grief affects every part of us – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and the way we socially interact with others. It's not just an emotion. *Here are some examples of common grief reactions:*

Physical

- tired, exhausted, weak, low energy – or high energy, restless, energised
- tearful, crying, sobbing – or unable to cry
- tight chest, shallow breathing, deep sighs
- sleeping a lot or unable to sleep, nightmares
- headaches, aching limbs, tense muscles
- eating more or less, nausea, digestion problems
- falling ill more easily
- existing health conditions may worsen
- clumsier, more accident prone
- more sensitive to sound, sights, taste, smell and touch

Mental

- preoccupied by your loss and what happened – or avoiding thinking about it at all
- going over and over things to make sense of it
- difficulty concentrating
- forgetful
- slow reactions
- wanting more information
- difficulty planning or making decisions, even small ones

Emotional

- shocked, stunned, disbelieving, numb
- disoriented, confused
- uncertain, worried, afraid
- guilty, blaming yourself or others
- angry, resentful, more easily upset
- regretful, *if only...*
- sad, pining for who or what's been lost
- despairing, vulnerable, alone
- feeling different from others, embarrassed, ashamed
- helpless, powerless
- negative thoughts, depressed, possibly suicidal thoughts

Spiritual

- questioning *Why?*
- strongly sensing the injustice of it
- seeing the world and life differently now, changed priorities
- drawing closer to beliefs and faith, or away from them
- searching for or sensing the presence of someone who has died or *tīpuna*/ancestors
- looking for meaning

Behavioural

- wanting to be with others more – or alone more
- able to talk about it – or not wanting to
- avoiding certain places or topics
- trouble coping, even with small things
- more sensitive about what others think
- sharing humour more to decrease tension
- avoiding remembering or feeling emotions, distracting yourself, keeping very busy
- more irritable with others, possibly aggressive
- making poor choices, doing things impulsively
- using more alcohol, drugs or other risk-taking that can be harmful



Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.

Helen Keller

How long does grief last?

The grief process takes longer than most of us expect.

There is no set timetable and it's different for everyone. The bigger the loss, the greater the grief. The more traumatic and frightening the loss, the more complex the grief can be. (See the 'Coping with Trauma' information sheet on the *Grief Reactions* page under PRACTICAL INFORMATION on the Victim Support website.)

Grief for any significant changes and losses will always be part of your life in some way. The intense, raw pain will lessen slowly, and life will begin to adjust to what's happened, but it's normal to feel some 'after shocks' through your life. All sorts of things can trigger some fresh grief reactions, even long afterwards – a song or piece of music, a photo, a place, or a calendar date. Gradually, recovering from such 'grief waves' becomes a little easier.

T.E.A.R.

A useful way to think about the grief process is using the acronym **TEAR**. Grief helps us...

To face and accept the reality of our loss and the changes it's brought.

Experience and work through the emotional hurt this brings.

Adjust to life being different, without things being how we expected them to be.

Reinvest in our life, so we can find ways to be okay and enjoy the good there is to be found.

“Time itself doesn't heal... it's what you do with the passing time that counts. You can let yourself grieve or try to avoid its pain. Avoiding it is understandable but trying to bury it isn't good for you and doesn't work. Grief is on your side, even though it doesn't feel like it at the start.

Ali

While grief centres on sadness and loss, trauma centres on fear

If you have been through an especially traumatic, frightening experience related to your loss, then at the same time your brain is processing grief, it's very likely that it has also activated the trauma process.

This second process is designed to help you to keep safe from harm and deal with the threat you sense, and its aftermath. In other words, there can be two processes underway at the same time.

There is some overlap of reactions, but the focus of reactions to trauma is fear and threat, while the focus of reactions to grief is sadness and loss. Sometimes people use the term Traumatic Grief as a way of describing the two processes being underway together.

Please see Victim Support's information sheet 'Coping with Trauma' on the *Grief Reactions* page under PRACTICAL INFORMATION on the Victim Support website for more about trauma and how it can affect the grief experience.



What can I do?

- ✓ **Allow yourself to grieve and adjust to what's happened.** It's okay to grieve in your own way.
- ✓ **Be patient with yourself.** Take one day at a time, or even one hour at a time if you need to. You can't rush grief and it can be very tiring.
- ✓ **Make looking after yourself a top priority.** Eat healthy and drink plenty of water. Keep active because exercise lifts mood and keeps you well. Get plenty of rest and sleep. Avoid excessive use of alcohol and don't use drugs.
- ✓ **Do what's worked for you before in hard and stressful times.** Put those positive things into action again. Avoid those things that haven't worked.
- ✓ **Take time to talk with someone you trust** about your loss and what you're coping with. Talk with a Victim Support Worker, a trusted cultural or faith leader, a trusted family/whānau member, or friend. You can also talk to your GP, a counsellor, or grief worker on the details at the foot of this page.
- ✓ **Find other helpful ways to let out your distress and tension.** Writing thoughts down, crying, walking or other exercise, playing music, or creating something.
- ✓ **Keep up a daily routine.** Even simple routines can help us feel more in control of things.
- ✓ **Several times each day, take several slow, deep belly breaths in and out.** An easy but powerful way to calm down and feel more in control.
- ✓ **Keep connected with others.** Regularly talk with, text or message those you know to keep in touch with them. Spend time with those who care about you. Consider joining a support group locally or online.
- ✓ **Accept support from others if it'll reduce some stress.** Practical help can make a real difference.
- ✓ **Avoid making big plans or decisions,** until things settle down and you can think more clearly.
- ✓ **If what happened to you or a loved one is in the media,** limit the time you listen, watch or read about it.
- ✓ **Take notice** of things around you that you are grateful for, despite your loss and grief.
- ✓ **Keep learning about grief.** Find out what others in similar situations have found helpful.
- ✓ **If you are also supporting grieving children, young people, relatives or friends,** remember they will each also grieve in their own ways. Contact Victim Support for links and resources that could help you with this.
- ✓ **Contact your GP if you are unwell or struggling with anxiety, depression or sleep problems.**
- ✓ **Seek extra help if, after a few months, your grief is not easing up or if its effects are dominating your daily life and causing you and/or others concern.** Sometimes grief can become complicated, and the pain of the loss is so constant and severe that it continues to be overwhelming most days and keeps you from resuming your life. In extreme cases, people can feel suicidal. See your GP or find a local counsellor or psychologist, who have the skills to help you deal with complicated grief. Perhaps also contact a cultural or faith elder you trust who can provide extra support at this time. (See Victim Support's information sheet 'Coping with Trauma' on the *Grief Reactions* page under PRACTICAL INFORMATION on the Victim Support website.)

How can Victim Support help?

- ✓ Call us on **0800 842 846** to be connected with a Support Worker who can provide practical help and information, emotional support, and referral to other services at this difficult time. We're available 24/7.
- ✓ Ask your Support Worker about how Victim Support can connect you with a professional counsellor in your community, and any financial support to help you with this.

Other places you can call to get help:

- ✓ Call or text the 24/7 *Need to Talk* helpline on 1737 to speak with a counsellor.
- ✓ Call a local helpline, e.g. Youthline (0800 376 633 or free text 234) or Lifeline (0800 543 354).
- ✓ Call Healthline about health concerns on 0800 611 116, (24/7).