



## Understanding the Different Forms of Grief



**Grief** is a natural and highly personal response to loss.

Although it is most commonly associated with the death of a loved one, it can also arise following other major life changes, including changes in health, the end of a relationship, retirement, pregnancy complications, job loss, or significant life transitions.

**Grief affects people in different ways and may involve emotional, physical, behavioural, and cognitive reactions.**

While grief is a **universal experience**, there is no right or wrong way to grieve and no set timeline for healing.

The following sections outline different forms of grief and how they may affect people in distinct ways.

### **1 Anticipatory Grief**

**Anticipatory grief occurs when we know that a significant loss is approaching.** This may happen when a loved one is living with a terminal illness, when an adult child is preparing to leave home, or when a relationship is nearing its end. In these situations, people often begin grieving before the actual loss occurs. Feelings of sadness, worry, fear, and uncertainty are common as individuals try to come to terms with the changes ahead. Although the loss has not yet happened, the grieving process has already begun and may continue long after the loss takes place.

## 2 Disenfranchised Grief

**Disenfranchised grief refers to grief associated with losses that are not always openly acknowledged by those around us.** As a result, individuals experiencing this type of grief may feel isolated in their sadness and may not receive the same level of support, sympathy, or condolences that often follow more socially recognised losses.

Disenfranchised grief can arise from many different types of loss. These may include the loss of a pet, pregnancy loss, the death of a friend, colleague or neighbour, the end of a therapeutic relationship, or the loss of a relationship through estrangement. Although these losses can be deeply painful, they are not always fully recognised by others, which can make the grieving process more challenging.

## 3 Cumulative Grief

**Cumulative grief occurs when several losses take place within a short period of time, with each loss adding to the impact of the others.** A person who experiences multiple losses close together may feel overwhelmed by the combined emotional weight. This type of grief can also be experienced by people in professions such as healthcare, palliative care, and first response, among others, where exposure to loss and bereavement can be a regular part of their work. Over time, repeated exposure to loss can build up emotionally, making each subsequent loss more difficult to cope with.

## 4 Delayed Grief

**Delayed grief occurs when a person's emotional response to a loss does not fully emerge at the time the loss takes place, but surfaces later — weeks, months, or even years afterwards.** In some cases, people may suppress their grief because they need to manage immediate responsibilities, such as making arrangements, supporting other family members, or coping with day-to-day demands. At other times, this may happen unconsciously as a way of protecting themselves from overwhelming emotions. Delayed grief can be confusing and distressing because it may appear to surface unexpectedly. It may also be misidentified, as the connection between current emotional distress and a past loss is not always immediately apparent. For individuals experiencing intense grief long after a loss, it is important to recognise that these feelings are valid and worthy of support.

## 5 Ambiguous Loss

**Ambiguous loss occurs when a loss is experienced without clear certainty or closure.** Unlike bereavement, where a death is confirmed, ambiguous loss leaves unanswered questions. For example, a person living with dementia may be physically present but psychologically absent. Similarly, when someone goes missing and their whereabouts remain unknown, loved ones may be left struggling between hope and grief.

Without the closure that often accompanies a confirmed loss, processing ambiguous loss can be particularly challenging. Individuals may find themselves feeling stuck between holding on and letting go, making it difficult to fully adjust to the loss. The uncertainty surrounding the situation can lead to ongoing feelings of sadness, confusion, anxiety, and helplessness.

## 6 Secondary Losses

**Secondary losses are the additional losses that can arise following a significant loss.** When someone passes away, for example, people are often grieving more than just the person themselves. They may also be grieving the future they had imagined together, the role that person played in their life, the routines they shared, the support they provided, or even aspects of their own identity connected to the relationship. Secondary losses can also occur following other major life changes, such as the end of a relationship, retirement, relocation, or loss of health — losses that can leave a significant emotional impact. Recognising secondary losses can help explain why grief is often more complex than it initially appears.

Grief can feel overwhelming at times and, while it is a natural response to loss, it does not have to be faced alone. If grief is affecting your daily life, relationships, work, or emotional wellbeing, speaking to someone you trust or seeking professional support can be an important step.



# The Stages of Grief



- Grief is a natural and deeply personal response to a meaningful loss, and it may involve a range of emotions over time.
- The five stages commonly associated with grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These stages do not always occur in this order, and emotions may shift throughout the grieving process.
- Denial may arise during the early stages of adapting to a significant loss.
- As the impact of the loss becomes clearer, feelings of anger and frustration may arise. Bargaining may also occur, as a person reflects on what might have been different or wishes they could change what has happened.
- Feelings of sadness and emptiness may become more noticeable as the loss is gradually processed.
- Acceptance does not mean the loss no longer hurts. It means learning to move forward while carrying the memories of what has been lost.
- There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and there is no set timeline for the process.
- If grief becomes overwhelming or begins to affect daily life, seeking support can be helpful. Speaking with someone you trust or with a qualified professional may provide reassurance, guidance and connection during a difficult time.



# Caregiver Burnout:

## Recognising the Signs, Understanding Grief and Maintaining Wellbeing

**Many people balance work with caring for an ageing parent, a partner with a chronic illness, or another loved one who depends on their support. While caregiving can be deeply rewarding, it can bring a range of emotional responses, including forms of grief that are not always immediately recognised.**

This grief may arise in response to changes in a loved one's health, abilities, independence or personality, as well as shifts in the caregiver's own routines, relationships and future expectations. Caregivers may also experience a sense of loss when personal opportunities or aspirations need to be put aside because of their caring responsibilities. These cumulative experiences can increase emotional strain and may contribute to, or occur alongside, caregiver burnout.

**Everyone feels tired from time to time. Caregiver burnout, however, goes beyond ordinary tiredness.**

It is a gradual state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion. Common signs may include feeling overwhelmed, irritable or emotionally drained. Sleep may become disrupted, concentration may require more effort, and activities that once brought satisfaction may feel less fulfilling. Feelings of guilt about resting or attending to personal needs may also occur. These emotional demands can gradually build, particularly when caregiving responsibilities are sustained over time. Understanding these emotional responses early can help caregivers notice when ordinary tiredness is becoming something more persistent and difficult to manage.

Maintaining personal wellbeing is an essential part of caregiving. Small, practical steps can make a real difference. Regular breaks, shared responsibilities, connection with trusted people and brief moments of quiet can help restore energy and sustain resilience. It can also be helpful to recognise and acknowledge feelings of grief rather than feeling that they should be ignored or set aside. Caregiving may involve mixed emotions, such as sadness, frustration, worry, guilt and moments of connection, and experiencing these feelings does not mean that someone cares any less for the person they are supporting. When signs of caregiver burnout are present, timely support can make a meaningful difference. Speaking with a trusted person or seeking professional guidance can help restore perspective, process difficult emotions and encourage healthier ways of coping. **Caregiving is an act of compassion, but it should not come at the expense of one's own wellbeing.** Prioritising rest, boundaries and appropriate support can help maintain the strength needed to continue providing care. Recognising both the demands of caregiving and the losses that may accompany it can be an important part of looking after oneself.

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