

# Good grief

Grief will come to us all at some point, so how do we cope when it strikes?

ANGELA HEISE explores.

**N**o-one can escape loss. It's an unavoidable part of life that goes way beyond death. There are many different kinds of loss: job, marriage, home, status, health – in short, any change in familiar relationships or circumstances. In current times, it includes the loss of freedom to move around, work and life routines, and social connections.

Sudden and predictable loss is hard to deal with. Managing unexpected loss is even harder and can really shake up your sense of security and confidence in life. It's therefore tempting to numb yourself and simply soldier on. However, handling the grief that accompanies any kind of loss is an important part of the adjustment process, one that we often ignore as we adapt to new conditions.

Grief is strongest when what was lost is not replaced with something else. When you retire, for example. Or when your physical health doesn't allow you pursue a hobby anymore. Or when you are suddenly stuck in one place with no perspective of that changing.

Grief has multiple dimensions, no timeline or end date. It is unpredictable and completely personal. There is no right way to grieve. You may want to ignore your loss, but in the end grief will find a way to leak out, push through, or explode when you least expect it. Depending on the severity and complexity of the loss, it can pass quickly or linger for a long time and include disrupted sleep, depression or rage, physical and mental exhaustion, and lack of motivation or the ability to concentrate. And since stress suppresses your immune

system, expressing your grief is crucial for the healing process.

So how do you productively grieve when there is no road map, when there are no sign posts?

First of all, and most importantly, feel what you feel. Don't simply suppress your emotions and soldier on. Express your sadness, anger, loneliness, overwhelm and anxiety. That doesn't mean you wallow. It means you take time to rebalance.

Grieving is important. It allows our neuro-chemistry to reset. So be mindful of the addictive qualities of anything you use to medicate your grief, be it alcohol, drugs, or food. And while anti-depressants definitely have a place, they should not be the first go-to solution.

So surround yourself with friends who are able to hold space for you and simply allow you to be, people who stay connected when you take time out and withdraw (which is also a healthy part of the process). Please tell anyone who asks you to 'get over it' because death and loss are part of life (yes, we know) to kindly mind their own business. Many people are uncomfortable with strong emotions and think that the head should rule the

heart, which is why they may think they serve you best when they ask you to put your feelings aside. Instead of numbing yourself for the sake of social compliance, take time to reset.

Is there a time to get over grief? If you are still yearning for what has been after an extended period of time and find that you cannot adjust to the present, it may be time to get professional help. What is an extended period of time depends on what you are grieving and whether it has left an irreplaceable hole in your life or was simply part of transitioning into something new.

Be mindful of the cumulative effect of numerous losses, especially in the current time.

Practise self-empathy and give yourself the space to acknowledge what is gone. Then let go and reorient towards new ways of fulfilling your needs while envisioning a new future. **LSJ**



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