



LeVa

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When you're grieving

What is grief?

Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the emotional, physical and spiritual pain you feel when someone or something important is gone. The more significant the loss or the deeper the relationship, the more intense grief can be.

Everyone deals with grief differently

There is no right or wrong way to experience grief.

You may feel like you're going crazy, feel like you're in a bad dream, or start to question your spiritual or religious beliefs. You might feel many emotions such as anger, hurt, betrayal, blame, shame/whakamā and disbelief, or even moments of relief or numbness. It is completely normal to feel these emotions and others – you are grieving.

The grieving process takes time. Healing happens gradually. It can't be forced or hurried – and there is no "normal" timetable for grieving. Some people start to feel better in weeks or months, for others it's years, especially after a sudden or traumatic loss. Whatever your grief experience, try to be gentle with yourself and others and allow the process to naturally unfold.

Staying connected with whānau, aiga/kainga, friends, faith communities, cultural practices and trusted helpers can make grief easier to carry.

What does grief look like?

Some people find it helpful to think about "stages" of grief such as denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Others do not see their grief this way at all. Grief is often more like waves that come and go than a straight line from one stage to the next. You do not have to move through any particular stages, or in a particular order, to heal. Some common reactions include:

- ✕ **Shock and disbelief** – Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting the person to show up, even though you know they are gone.
- ✕ **Sadness** – Deep sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot, find that tears will not come at all, or feel emotionally unstable.
- ✕ **Guilt** – You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent what happened, even if there was nothing more you could have done.
- ✕ **Anger** – Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry with yourself, God, the doctors or even the person who died for abandoning you. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you. It can help to talk about these feelings with people you trust.
- ✕ **Fear** – A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless or insecure. You may even have trouble concentrating or have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now carry.
- ✕ **Physical symptoms** – Grief is felt in the body as well as the heart and mind. Common physical reactions include fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and difficulty sleeping.

None of these signs automatically mean something is "wrong" with you, they can be part of grief. If they are very intense, go on for a long time, or make it hard to get through the day, it can help to reach out for extra support.

Coping with grief

Get support

Take time and space to nurture yourself and others. The single most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people.

- ✕ **Sharing with other people** can reduce the sense of isolation and loneliness that comes with grief.
- ✕ **Allow people to help you** – Don't be embarrassed to accept their help. You will be able to help someone else at another time. It is your turn now.
- ✕ **Talk to family and friends** – Sharing memories and stories, thoughts and feelings can be comforting and strengthen your connection with your loved one.
- ✕ **Connect** – Spend time with positive people in your life and nature.
- ✕ **Communicate** with others all the time, especially if things aren't going well.
- ✕ **Pray** if you draw comfort from your faith, go to church for more support.

Take care of you

- ✕ **Exercise** – Do something to use pent-up energy, e.g. go jogging, boxing, walking, swimming, cycling.
- ✕ **Find ways to relax** – Get a massage. Go to the movies with mates. Just hang.
- ✕ **Connect** with our emotions through music, art, sport or writing. Write a letter or a poem about how you are feeling.
- ✕ **Get enough sleep** – Limit alcohol and caffeine, exercise and maintain a routine at bedtime.
- ✕ **Talk to someone you trust** – Feeling and expressing your emotions and thoughts with someone is an important part of healing.
- ✕ **Go easy on yourself** – Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgement. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.

When grief doesn't go away

It's normal to feel sad, numb or angry following a loss. But as time passes these emotions should become less intense. If you aren't feeling better over time, it may be a sign that your grief has developed into a more serious problem. It's OK to say you are struggling and ask for help

When and where to seek extra support

Consider reaching out for more support if:

- ✕ your feelings are overwhelming most of the time, or you feel stuck and unable to manage daily life
- ✕ you feel constantly numb, hopeless, or disconnected from people and things you usually care about
- ✕ you are using alcohol or drugs more to cope with your grief
- ✕ you have thoughts about hurting yourself or feel that life is not worth living.

Places and people who can help may include:

- ✕ whānau, aiga/kainga, friends, kaumātua, church or faith leaders, and cultural or community elders
- ✕ peer support or bereavement groups where you can talk with others who have experienced loss
- ✕ your GP, counsellor, psychologist or other mental health professional
- ✕ local or national helplines and crisis services (phone, text or online chat), which can offer confidential support if you need help urgently.

If you are ever worried that you or someone else might be in immediate danger, contact emergency services right away. It is always okay to ask for help.

Where can I find help?

1737 Need to Talk – free call or text 1737

Depression Helpline – 0800 111 757

Youthline – 0800 376 633, free text 234
or email talk@youthline.co.nz

Lifeline – 0800 543 354 or text HELP (4357)

www.leva.co.nz – for resources and information

www.auntydee.co.nz – free online support tool

www.mentalwealth.nz – for information to feel good, live well and be connected

www.depression.org.nz – includes The Journal online help service

www.thelowdown.co.nz – visit the website or free text 5626

www.mentalhealth.org.nz – for resources and information

www.skylight.org.nz – for resources and information



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