

Tools2Thrive — Grief

What is grief?

The word “grief” is used to describe what we feel and what we do after the loss of someone or something that is very important to us.

Grief comes when we lose relationships, good health, a job, a way of life or when we lose a loved one. We may feel grief and sadness today because of the after-effects of the stolen generations. We may feel separated from our traditional spiritual strengths of land, language, art, music, story telling, dance, and law. We may feel we have lost our cultural heritage and our own cultural identity. Grief is not an illness – it can not be cured or hurried along. No two people grieve and start healing in the same way. It changes depending upon who or what we have lost, our past history, our cultural and spiritual beliefs, and our personality. There is no right or wrong way to experience grief.

Some common worries we might have during times of grief are:

- Sadness, crying
- Shock, numbness, not feeling anything at all for a while
- Difficulty accepting the loss, not believing it has happened
- Anger, guilt, shame, blame
- Isolation, alienation, loneliness
- Confusion
- Not looking after ourselves or others
- Not caring about work
- Relief (that the suffering is over or that a new beginning can now take place)
- Fear that what we feel or are doing is not normal
- Thoughts of self harm or suicide
- Acting out of character and being different to the way we usually are
- Substance abuse, drinking, using drugs or smoking too much
- Physical worries such as headaches, not eating well, or not sleeping well
- Seeing or hearing the spirit of the person who is gone (this can be normal and okay)
- Wanting to go home to country or family
- Difficulty concentrating

Why do people grieve differently? We are all different. We come from different family backgrounds and cultures. Every culture has its own ways of grieving.

How long does grief last? We can't put a time limit on grief. We don't know how long it will last. The best answer seems to be “as long as it takes.” Grief doesn't follow a smooth pathway and is different for each of us. We gradually learn to live with the loss.

The way we adjust depends on what sort of person we are, how we grieve, who we grieve with, what grief we have been through before, our physical health and the support we have.

There are no simple ways to get through the pain caused by loss. We may feel that no person, no words, no talk can ease the pain. However, when we feel ready, hearing about what has helped other people might help us, too.

Let yourself grieve

It is important to be able to express and share our sadness and grief rather than keeping our feelings locked inside. At times, we may feel overwhelmed by the intensity and strength of our feelings. That is normal and okay. We can delay grief and hold it off for a while, but we cannot avoid it. If we delay and avoid feeling the pain of grief for too long, we will find it harder to deal with the next time worry or grief visits our life.

We don't all show our grief by crying.

There are many other ways to let those strong feelings out, including:

- Physical activity and doing lots of things
- Listening to and playing music
- Storytelling
- Dancing
- Writing
- Painting, drawing, etc.
- Talking about the loss
- Meditating
- Keeping a diary of feelings and memories
- Ceremonies and memorials to express our feelings
- Praying
- Rituals and ceremonies that are part of family, cultural and/or religious heritage