

# *Grief – how to ease the agony*

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Grief is our emotional response to what our unique personality regards as a significant loss. The depth of our grief relates to the level of our relationship with what is lost.

We all grieve differently.

Some of us can readily express our emotions and are open to offers of help – others bottle feelings up and resist offers of help.

Most people readily recognise that the death of a loved one is a reason for grief. But there is a very wide range of other losses that can be triggers for grief.

Any change in our circumstances is a loss of the familiar, requiring an adjustment of our feelings. For example, we may be taken by surprise when our children leave home or go away to school for the first time.

Our rural friends are going through a trying time with loss of income and security, loss of schooling affordability, loss of the means to replace an unreliable car or machinery, loss of lifestyle no longer affordable, loss of family cohesion as a partner leaves to find work off-farm. So the list of possible losses goes on and we may be grieving over several concurrent losses.

For a child, the loss of a treasured possession or a pet can be almost as devastating as the death of a loved partner for an adult. A broken relationship can be particularly trying as there is no closure. When a terminal illness is prolonged there is an opportunity to anticipate the death, and our feelings adjust to more easily cope – there has been an opportunity to share the life story and say ‘goodbye’.

Sudden death from an accident leaves so many things unsaid with no chance to say ‘I’ve loved and appreciated you’.

There may be personal physical losses such as blindness, mastectomy, arthritis, loss of mobility, Alzheimer’s, cardiac illness. Birth related losses – miscarriage, neo-natal death and infertility. Psychological – loss of dignity and self-respect, life expectation, status, sexual drive or desirability, bodily functions, youth. Losses such as job, peace of mind from home invasions, fire or flood, income, no longer the breadwinner; for migrants, loss of homeland.

What are the feelings associated with grief; what is their effect on us and how do we deal with them?

These are just names that we have given to feelings. Many people don’t know what their feeling is – they just feel numb – and a common response to this strange numb feeling is to wonder if they are going crazy.

What do you do to ease this agony?

- Allow yourself to fully experience your feelings
- Accept the suffering and the care of others
- Seek out and develop creative activities as outlets – not just ‘busy work’
- Have a plan for each day – one task at a time
- Don’t be too hard on yourself
- Join a sharing or grief group

- Remember, what is helpful to you is what matters and counts

#### Helping a grieving person

- Listen and hear what is being said
- Accept that everyone grieves differently
- Allow the griever time to grieve
- Don't prevent the repression of guilt and anger
- Avoid clichés like 'Well, he had a good innings'
- Encourage talking but be content to just be there quietly alongside
- Continue to give caring support – many drop off after a short while