



The healing journey

Bereavement support

St AGNES'
CATHOLIC PARISH



Acknowledgements

The information in this booklet is intended as a guide only. Grief is deeply personal, and every person's healing journey is unique.

This booklet was originally developed in Hawaii and has since been adapted to Australian standards for the benefit of individuals, families, and friends navigating the loss of a loved one.

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– Sharmain Peterson

Residential Services Lead

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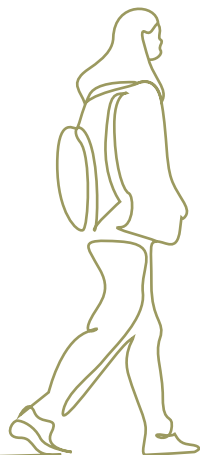
Grieving the loss of a loved one is a journey toward healing. In the early days, the path may feel rocky, overwhelming, or unclear. You may feel as though you cannot see what lies ahead.

With time, many people find that the intensity of grief softens and that moments of healing begin to appear. This does not mean the loss disappears. Rather, people often learn how to carry their grief while continuing to live.

Grief does not follow a single pattern. Some people experience many emotions; others experience only a few. Gender, culture, personality, life experience, beliefs, values, and spirituality can all influence how grief is felt and expressed.

Most people do not “get over” the loss of someone they love. Instead, they gradually adapt to the loss and integrate it into their lives in a way that allows them to move forward.

There is no timetable and no correct way to grieve. Healing occurs when a person reaches a place of acceptance and begins to experience a renewed sense of hope — however long that may take.



Common expressions of grief

Grief can be expressed in many different ways, reflecting each person's unique experience and journey.

Some people want to talk about their feelings. Others prefer quiet reflection. Some cry often; others may not cry at all. Some find comfort in returning to routine quickly, while others need time away from usual activities.

What matters most is finding safe and supportive ways to express grief and move through the healing process.

Although each journey is unique, many people experience some of the following emotions.

"Guilt is perhaps the most painful companion of death."

— Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

Sadness

Waves of sadness are very common and can sometimes feel overwhelming. You may feel as though happiness will never return. Over time, the intensity of sadness usually lessens, even though moments of grief may still arise.

Loneliness

Loss often brings deep feelings of loneliness. Returning to an empty home, revisiting familiar places, or facing quiet evenings and weekends can intensify these feelings. Missing routines and companionship is natural.

Anger

You may feel anger toward the person who died, health professionals, family members, friends, or even God. Anger may also turn inward and contribute to withdrawal, depression, or physical illness. These feelings are a common part of grief.

Guilt and self-blame

Thoughts such as “If only I had...” or “I should have done more” are very common. While these thoughts are understandable, prolonged guilt can make healing more difficult. Self-compassion is an important part of the grieving process.

Anxiety

The death of a loved one often brings uncertainty about the future. You may feel lost or unsteady, particularly if shared plans have ended. Anxiety about what lies ahead is a natural response to loss.

Relief

If a death followed a long illness, you may feel relief that suffering has ended. Relief can coexist with sadness, and there is no need to feel guilty for feeling this way.

Gratitude and thankfulness

Some people feel a sense of peace or thankfulness following a death. Feeling gratitude does not mean you loved the person any less. These feelings can be deeply healing.

Emotional ups and downs

Grief is rarely steady. One day you may feel almost normal; the next you may feel overwhelmed again. Anniversaries, holidays, birthdays, familiar places, or seeing someone who resembles your loved one can trigger renewed sadness.

Physical responses to grief

Grief affects the body as well as the mind.

*"In the end, it's not the years
in your life that count, it's the
life in your years."*

— Abraham Lincoln



Sleep disturbance and dreams

Difficulty sleeping and vivid dreams involving death or the deceased are common, especially in the early stages of grief.

Helpful strategies:

Relaxation techniques, gentle exercise, meditation, music, or short-term sleep aids may help. Talking about troubling dreams can also support healing.

Physical Discomfort and Appetite Changes

You may experience stomach discomfort, chest tightness, fatigue, or loss of appetite.

Helpful strategies:

Small, regular meals may be easier than large ones. Accept meals offered by friends and family. Eating with others can help restore routine.

Confusion and Difficulty Concentrating

Memory lapses, confusion, and difficulty focusing are common in early grief. These experiences are usually temporary. If confusion persists for a long period, it may indicate depression or the need for professional support, which can ease feelings of helplessness and confusion.

Signs of healthy grieving

You may be grieving in a healthy way if you can recognise some of the following:

- I can experience **moments of joy**, even though I miss my loved one
- I feel **sad, angry, or anxious** at times, but I can share my feelings
- I can **accept help** or support when it is being offered
- I sometimes feel **guilty or lonely**, but I can still enjoy aspects of life
- I **believe I will cope** better as time passes

These are signs that your grief is progressing in a natural way.



Myths about grief

Grief affects the body as well as the mind.

Myth 1:

“You should be over this by now.”

Grief does not follow a schedule. People need support for as long as they need it.

Myth 2:

“Time heals all wounds.”

Time alone does not heal grief, but it can soften its intensity.

Myth 3:

“If you’re not crying, you’re not really grieving.”

People express grief in different ways. Tears are only one expression.

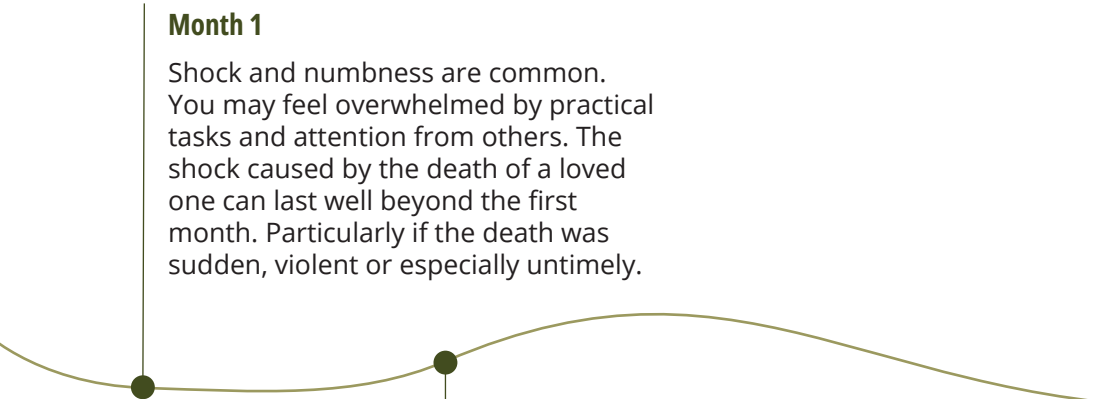
Myth 4:

“Men are not good at grieving.”

Men and women grieve differently, but no way is wrong. Everyone deserves support.

Is there a timeline for grief?

The following timeline is a **general guide only**, not a rule. You may move back and forth between experiences or not recognise them at all.



Month 1

Shock and numbness are common. You may feel overwhelmed by practical tasks and attention from others. The shock caused by the death of a loved one can last well beyond the first month. Particularly if the death was sudden, violent or especially untimely.

Around month 3

Support from others may lessen as the reality of loss becomes clearer, making this a particularly difficult period. You may feel pressure from family and friends to resume normal activities and “get over” your loss — yet you may still need more time to come to terms with your grief.

Significant anniversaries

Difficult days can include holidays, birthdays, wedding anniversaries, family and school reunions, and key dates from the illness — such as the date of diagnosis or death. Try to lean on the support of family and friends during these times.

*"The journey of a thousand miles
must begin with a single step."*

— Lao Tzu

Months 4–12

Many people begin to have more good days than bad, though grief may still resurface unexpectedly. It is normal to still feel intense emotion or sadness from time to time. Remember, it is not a setback.

Second year

People often begin to establish new routines and a revised sense of identity.

First anniversary

Anniversaries can intensify grief. Seeking extra support during this time is encouraged.

Beyond

Moments of sadness may still arise, even years later. Memories may surface without warning. This is a natural part of loving and remembering.

When grief becomes complicated

Most people gradually adapt to loss, even though grief remains part of their life.

Grief may become **complicated** when a person feels stuck and unable to function or integrate the loss over time. This is not a failure or weakness — it is a sign that additional support may help.

Free grief support in Australia:

GriefLine – www.griefline.org.au

Important Support Information

If you are feeling unsafe or having thoughts of harming yourself, please seek immediate help:

Lifeline: 13 11 14 (24/7)

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

Emergency: Call 000

You are not alone, and help is always available.

Signs that extra support may be needed

While grief is a natural response to loss, there are times when support may be helpful.

Physical signs

- Ongoing weight changes
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- Persistent sleep problems
- Neglect of personal health or hygiene

Functional signs

- Ongoing inability to care for oneself or others
- Difficulty functioning in daily life
- Ongoing memory issues

Emotional signs

- Persistent disbelief about the death
- Intense preoccupation with the deceased
- Ongoing hopelessness or numbness
- Prolonged anger or hostility
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

When and where to seek help

If you recognise any of the signs above, or if you feel overwhelmed, you may consider speaking with:

- Your faith or spiritual community
- Your GP or healthcare provider
- A bereavement or grief support group
- A counsellor or psychologist

Signs you may need professional support

- ☐ I feel unable to express my feelings
- ☐ My physical or mental health is declining
- ☐ I feel sad or alone most of the time
- ☐ I feel responsible for my loved one's death
- ☐ I have thoughts of ending my life

If any of these apply to you, please speak with a doctor, clergy member, or healthcare professional.

Final note

Grief is not something to “fix.” It is something to be lived through, carried, and gently integrated over time.

Be patient with yourself. Seek support when you need it. Healing does not mean forgetting — it means learning how to live while remembering.



