

INFORMATION ON GRIEF

What is grief?

Grief is the natural reaction to loss and can influence the physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and spiritual aspects of our lives. Grief can be experienced in response to a variety of loss-related events, such as the death of a loved one, separation or divorce, the loss of a sense of safety or predictability, physical incapacity through disability, or the loss of one's home or community due to disaster.

People respond to loss in a variety of ways. Whilst some find it helpful to talk openly about the experience, others prefer time alone. The intensity and duration of the grieving process differs between individuals. The experience of grief will typically dominate emotions, thoughts and behaviours for many weeks or months. As time passes, most individuals adjust and continue functioning well although a sense of loss will remain. Most bereaved people will not need professional help, however a significant minority (estimated at 10 to 20 percent) require and seek professional support.

Signs and symptoms

A variety of emotions, thoughts, sensations, and behaviours can be associated with the grief experience, including:

Emotional	Cognitive	Physical & behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness, • Anger, • Guilt and remorse, • Anxiety, • Loneliness, • Helplessness, • Shock and disbelief, • Relief, and • A sense of yearning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion, • Difficulty concentrating, • Preoccupation with loss, • Loss of interest in pleasurable activities, and • Vivid dreams or nightmares. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscle tightness, • Fatigue or reduced energy, • Sleep disturbance, • Social withdrawal, • Changes in appetite, • Crying, • Health concerns, • Aches and pains, • Restlessness, • Avoiding places or people that trigger memories of the loss, and • Treasuring objects associated with the loss.

There can also be significant changes in spiritual or philosophical views and beliefs.

Evidence-based psychological approaches and strategies

Regardless of the circumstances, losing a loved one can cause great pain and suffering. Most people learn to manage grief and adjust to loss with time. Maintaining self-care activities and routines and having adequate social support available can be helpful during the time of adjustment. For people who experience prolonged or complicated grief reactions, there are more targeted psychological interventions and strategies can be of benefit.

💧 **Self-care:** Loss and grief can compromise a person ability to care for themselves. This has been associated with poor health outcomes. Maintaining self-care activities and routines can benefit both the physical and mental health of a grieving individual. Activities include:

- ✓ Healthy and regular meals,
- ✓ Drinking plenty of water,
- ✓ Maintaining a routine,
- ✓ Physical exercise,
- ✓ Enjoyable activities,
- ✓ Limiting alcohol and drug use
- ✓ Normal sleep patterns, and
- ✓ Relaxation activities,
- ✓ Time with friends and family, and
- ✓ Psychological counselling.



💧 **Social support:** Appropriate social support can reduce the psychological burden of grief. Individuals require different types and/or quantities of social support during the grieving process including:

- ✓ **Instrumental** support such as assistance with funeral arrangements, help with housework and meal preparation or help with insurance claims.
- ✓ **Emotional** support such as providing comfort and reassurance, talking about the loss, listening with compassion, or sharing memories.
- ✓ **Information** support such as financial advice or helping the individual understand how and/or why the loss occurred.

💧 **Psychological strategies** - Psychological treatment for complicated or prolonged grief is beneficial and includes:

1. **Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)** for complicated grief which promotes helpful thoughts and behaviours.
2. **Focused family grief therapy** that aims to enhance the functioning and communication within a family preventing complications of bereavement.
3. **Complicated grief treatment** that addresses symptoms of loss by helping individuals re-establish relationships and focus on personal life goals.
4. **Meaning reconstruction approaches** that assist people find meaning and significance in their loss and ongoing lives.

At iflow psychology we use an integrative approach drawing on various therapeutic models and tailor treatment to individual needs. We teach a set of basic tools to enhance relaxation and quality of life as a foundation while simultaneously working on presenting issues. We promote engagement in activities that involve 'flow' states to assist in achieving an optimal life style and quality of life.

How a psychologist can help

Grief is a normal response to loss and many people learn to adjust to loss on their own. Some individuals, however, require assistance from a psychologist to help them adjust to loss and cope with grief. Through discussion and assessment of a client's wellbeing, we gain an understanding of the client's situation and develop a treatment plan.

When to seek professional help

If grief is affecting a person's work, school, home life, or relationships, psychological assistance should be considered. A GP can also organise a referral to a registered psychologist through the Better Access to Mental Health Care items. You may print a referral form from our website to assist your doctor.

iflow psychology can assist. **Just call 0431 564 257 or book an appointment online** at www.iflowpsychology.com.au

