



The Counselling & Personal Development Service

Dublin City University

What is Loss, Grief and Transition?



Grief is our natural process of reaction and adjustment to loss and change. When we lose someone or something important to us; we grieve. Loss and bereavement is not an illness, rather it is a natural part of life.

There are many types of loss including the death of a grandparent(s), parent(s), extended family member(s) or a friend(s) but also there is loss due to illness, separation, relationship breakup, loss of identity, the familiar, a treasured possession or a beloved pet.

A Rainbow of Loss, Grief and Transition

Loss due to the death of a grandparent/grandparents... loss of parents...loss of extended family members... loss of friends... loss of health... loss of relationship... loss of identity... loss of the familiar... loss of a treasured possession... loss of a beloved pet... Loss of culture... loss of abilities... anticipated loss... missed opportunities... roads not taken... being left behind... unfulfilled expectations... unspoken words... loss of purpose... loss of contact... loss of meaning... loss of sense safety in the world... disconnection with nature... loss of global equality and fairness.



What is the grief process?

For most of us the death of someone close may be the biggest loss we face. Your grieving process is to try to make sense of what has happened while learning to live your life without that person. Sometimes you feel you are coping quite well but one day you may experience a sudden burst of grief. It may help to remember that the thoughts and feelings will come and go as you try to come to terms with grief while also living your day-to-day life.

The death of someone close often comes as a shock, even if you expected it. You can't really prepare yourself for the impact it will have in your life. Sudden, unexpected death and death following a serious illness each bring their own kinds of pain, but pain cannot be compared. The worst pain is the pain you're going through and the worst loss is your loss.



How long will it take?

Each person grieves in their own way, so there is no set formula. There is no fixed timeline or timetable but it can take longer than you think. We are likely to experience both good and bad days, but most people find that gradually, as time goes by, things do become easier and the intensity of feelings is reduced.

Loss and grief affects all aspects of life and it has its own rhythm. Grief is sometimes compared to climbing a spiral staircase where things can look and feel like you are just going in circles, yet you are actually making progress. Sometimes you may feel you are coping quite well and then experience a burst of grief as you are reminded of your loss. It may be confusing to suddenly feel very sad if you feel you have already grieved. It may help to remember that feelings are not time bound and may not happen in a set way.

What to expect

There is no right way to grieve. No two people's reactions will be the same, but these are some reactions you might have: feeling tired yet finding it difficult to sleep, numb, sad, shocked, irritable, angry, relieved, guilty, lonely, depressed, frightened, or helpless. These feelings can come and go and do not follow any particular sequence.

Your appetite might change and energy levels might be low. Your concentration might be affected so that you are absent minded, or have difficulty absorbing new information.

You may find yourself thinking a lot about the loss and the events leading up to it. Sometimes thoughts can be somewhat overwhelming, resulting in a decrease in your ability to concentrate and focus.

You may feel like withdrawing and needing time alone or you may feel a need to tell the story of your loss. You may find that you seek out people who can understand your need to talk and distance yourself from people who are uncomfortable with this.



What might help?

➤ Accept your feelings. Firstly there is no right or wrong way to feel after losing someone or something you care about. Try as best you can to accept the feelings you are having. Which may include sadness, guilt, anger, or feeling nothing at all. Knowing that these feelings are part of grieving may help you to be easier on yourself during this difficult time. Also try as best you can to

allow the range of feelings you may be experiencing to find some expression. You may consider writing down how you feel or finding a way of expressing it creatively either through music, art, drawing, sport etc.

➤ Let yourself cry. Crying can be helpful. Like opening a pressure valve. It's definitely not a sign of weakness, rather it's a way of getting out what is going on for you. There is no deadline for getting over what you are going through. If you feel uncomfortable crying in front of people, find your own safe place.

➤ Resourcing yourself: Resourcing yourself at this time is particularly important. For example, allow yourself to sleep when needed, consider a walk, move out into nature, seek spiritual support, listen to music, read, accept support, and if your appetite is waning try to as best you can to eat well.

➤ Talk. Talking to someone you trust may help ease your feelings of grief, allowing a way of saying how you are doing and may help to make sense of things. Giving yourself this permission to talk about your experience. It can also be good to talk about what you're going through with people who are going through the same or who have been through a similar experience.

➤ Saying goodbye. Saying goodbye when you're ready is important. There are a number of ways in which you can do this, for example to go to the funeral, or arranged ceremony. You may wish to visit familiar places or take part in local customs, like wakes, storytelling, anniversaries, memorials, or in any way that links you to the person that has particular meaning or significance. It's totally up to you when and how you say goodbye, but it does help.

➤ Academic support. You may consider letting your Programme Chair know of your bereavement and discuss any supports that may be available in helping you best approach your academic work. For information on extenuating circumstances you can click on the following link:
<https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/registry/pdfs/R30.pdf>

For information on Postponement of Assessment/Examination R33 form click on the following link:
<https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/registry/pdfs/R33.pdf> . In addition you may also consider visiting the student advice centre, which will provide you with support and guidance on these relevant academic options. The link to the student advice centre is here:
<http://www.dcu.ie/advice/index.shtml>

➤ Student support.

If you would like to access spiritual support visit the following link for full details:

<http://www.dcu.ie/chaplaincy/index.shtml>

If you would like to access counselling visit the following link:

<http://www.dcu.ie/counselling/index.shtml>

You will find a full list of all services at this link; <http://www.dcu.ie/students/index.shtml>.

➤ Moving back into your routines The period of time after a significant loss can be difficult. You may feel lonely or empty or you may not feel anything at all. In the case of bereavement, you may have been surrounded by people for a number of days and now find yourself suddenly more on your own. The day to day tasks of college work and study will eventually need to be approached again, some people need time before moving back into college life while others want to throw themselves back into work. Follow what best supports you. It's totally normal to have some days that are tough and some that are much easier. It might help to plan your return.

➤ Remembering. You may think about keeping some mementos - if you have lost a person special to you perhaps you could keep a photo, a piece of jewellery or item of clothing, or other item to remind you of them.

➤ Managing Special occasions. If you have lost someone close to you Christmas can be a time when you feel their absence more than normal. It's probably a time you used to spending with them. They might well be little things that remind you of them. Similarly birthdays and anniversaries and other important days can be hard when we have lost someone we love. It's natural to feel that they should be there to celebrate with you. It's helpful to plan ahead for such days. Talk with your family and friends about how best to do this. It can be helpful to include a few minutes in the day to remember the people who aren't there. It can also be helpful to plan taking some time out for yourself during such days. Treat yourself with care and plan something you enjoy to do.



Poem

To One In Sorrow

by - Grace Noll Crowell

*Let me come in where you are weeping, friend,
And let me take your hand.
I, who have known a sorrow such as yours, can understand.
Let me come in -- I would be very still beside you in your grief;
I would not bid you cease your weeping, friend,
Tears bring relief. Let me come in -- and hold your hand,
For I have known a sorrow such as yours,
And understand.*

How to help a friend

When one of your friends is close to someone who has died, it can be tough for you to know how to help them or decide what to say. It's okay to feel unsure and here are some ways you could support them:

1. Letting them know you care. Friends are going to be important to the person experiencing the loss and so letting them know you care is helpful. You may want to do this in person, and/or given them a call, send a card.
2. Be available. Call, stop by to talk, share a meal or activity. Your presence and companionship are important. During this difficult time your presence and friendship can be of great support. Your friend may appreciate knowing that you are around if they want to chat, or just want someone to hang out with.
3. Not knowing what to say. Knowing what to say may be hard. It's okay to be honest and let your friend know that you are at a loss for words. You may want to start by asking, if there is anything you can do.
4. Listening. Your friend may want to talk about the person they have lost. Giving them this chance to talk may be helpful for them. Allow your friend to express however they are feeling. Try not to judge how they are reacting. Don't feel any pressure in thinking you have to offer advice. You don't need to have answers. Genuine listening with care for the other person is in itself very powerful. It is not uncommon for people who are grieving to go over stories and memories of the lost one a number of times. Be patient with this.
5. Stay in contact. Keeping in contact may be a way of letting your friend know you are there if they need you. If you are planning to hang out with other friends ask your friend to come along. Remember that they are probably going to cope better with quieter things like going to the movies or hanging out at someone's place rather than going to parties. Staying in contact is important not just immediately after the loss but especially later when grief is still intense but when others have resumed their daily lives and support for the bereaved may have dwindled.
6. Encourage self care. Encourage your friend to care for himself or herself physically, emotionally, and socially. Encourage your friend to seek out support and/or professional help, if appropriate.
7. Accept your own limitations. Accept that you cannot eliminate the pain your friend is experiencing. Grief is a natural, expected response to loss and each person works through it in his/her own way and at his/her own pace. Be supportive while also taking care of yourself.

Reading for Support

There are a number of books available in the DCU library on the topic of Loss, Grief and Bereavement, as part of bibliotherapy offered by the Counselling and Personal Development Service. You can access the full list of books available at this link

<http://www4.dcu.ie/counselling/bibliotherapy.shtml>

Here are few of the titles available:

Bereavement :

An Introduction To Coping With Grief

by Sue Morris 2010

This book focuses on recognising and coping with grief.

The Courage To Grieve

by Judy Tatelbaum 2008 William Morrow

The book focuses on the process and response to the death of a loved-one.

The Loss that is Forever, the Lifelong Impact of the Early Loss of a Mother or Father

by Maxine Harris 1996

Plume Publishers

Grieving the loss of a parent.

Facing Grief: Bereavement And The Young Adult.

by Susan Wallbank 2003 Lutterworth Press.

Discusses the effects and coping with emotions by a loss of a loved one

Useful websites

***Bereavement support and counselling - Irish Hospice Foundation www.hospicefoundation.ie**

(under the Bereavement link on this website, you can access information videos and publications on understanding loss and grief, coping with loss, supporting those suffering from loss and lots of news and events that keep you updated on local and national supports)

***Website on supporting and informing younger people on all aspects of loss and grief.**

<http://ie.reachout.com/inform-yourself/loss-and-grief/>

* Practical information on what to do when someone close to you dies and info on state and voluntary support services <http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/death/>

(Information on: [Before a death](#), [After a death](#), [Money matters after a death](#), [The deceased's estate](#), [Bereavement counselling and support](#), [Sudden or unexplained death](#))

* The Bereavement Counselling Service www.bereavementireland.com

(offers support and counselling to enable people deal with their grief. This applies not only to those directly bereaved through death, stillbirth, miscarriage, abortion etc., but also to those whose lives are affected by the losses of those near to them. The Bereavement Counselling Service is a group of volunteers recruited and trained in the theory of grief and the counselling of bereaved individuals.)

* Website with links to information on various wellbeing topics including grief with the option of speaking with a counsellor/therapist on the phone, via skype or face to face.

<https://mymind.org/coping-with-bereavement/>

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