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*Cruse*  
Bereavement  
Support

# Grief and you



[cruse.org.uk](https://www.cruse.org.uk)

# About Grief

When someone close to you dies it can be the most painful thing you will experience. It can be hard to make sense of what has happened, and you may feel overwhelmed by a range of emotions and thoughts.

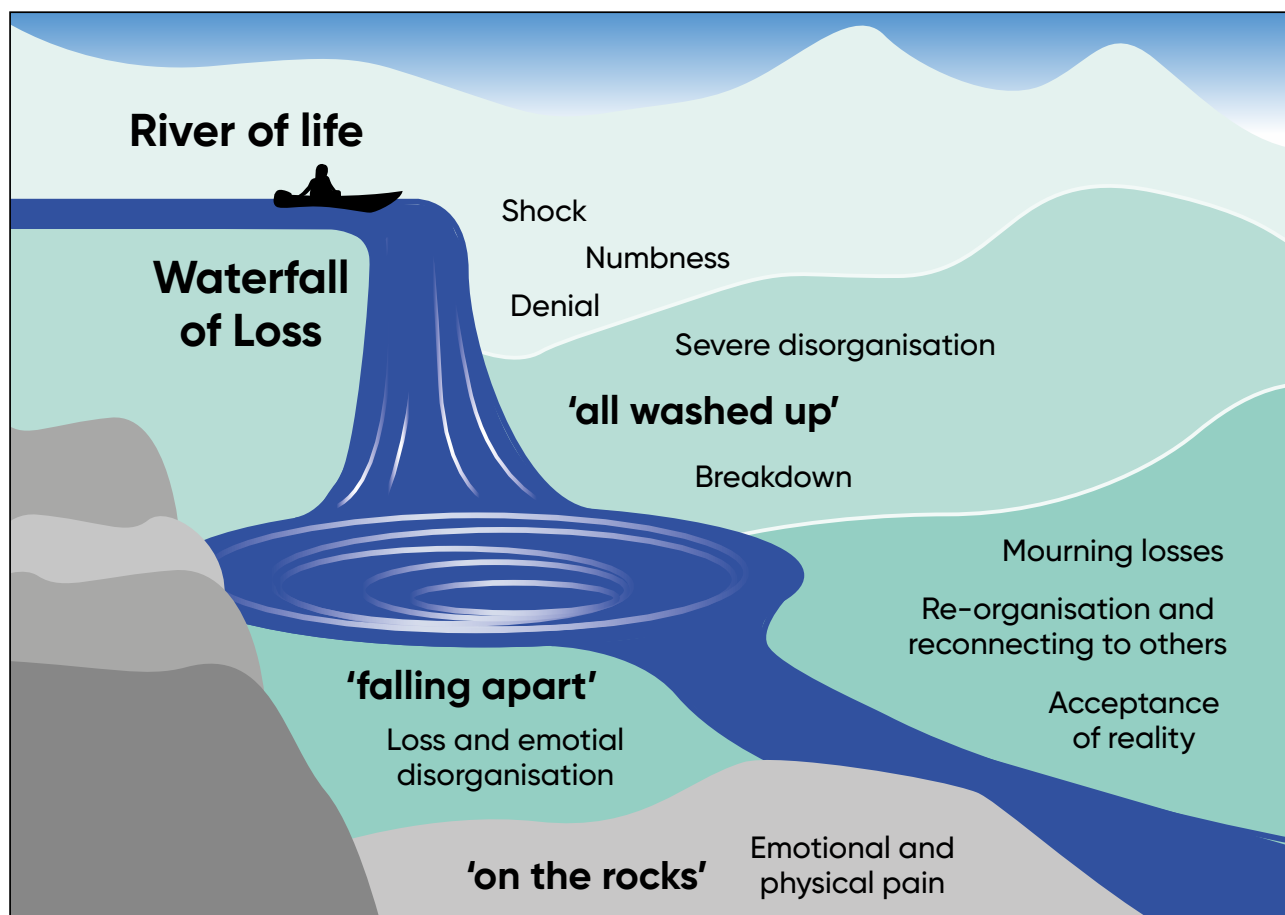
## Stages of grief

Grief is a journey that is different for everybody. When someone close to you dies it can be like falling over the edge of a cliff or waterfall – where suddenly there is nothing firm beneath your feet. In those early days you may feel shocked or numb.

Over time reality sets in and you can experience a range of emotions which may include sadness, anger, anxiety, fear, guilt and regret. They can change from moment to moment like you are

caught in a whirlpool of feelings. You may experience physical aches and pains and some people can feel a sense of hopelessness, with no meaning to their life.

As you process your grief by talking to friends, family or maybe with support from your community or professionals you can find calmer water again: piecing a new life together without the person you loved in it. Grief does change people and although your life will be different it can have purpose and happiness again.



## Everybody grieves differently

There is no 'right way' to grieve. It will depend on a range of circumstances, such as, who died and your relationship to them, how they died, whether it was expected or sudden, what support you have and what else may be going on in your life when you are bereaved. Grieving and showing emotions is not a sign of weakness, it is a normal human reaction to losing someone you care for. It's important to remember that whatever your journey is, that is normal for you, even if it's different to other friends or family who are also affected by the loss.

## It is normal (for you)

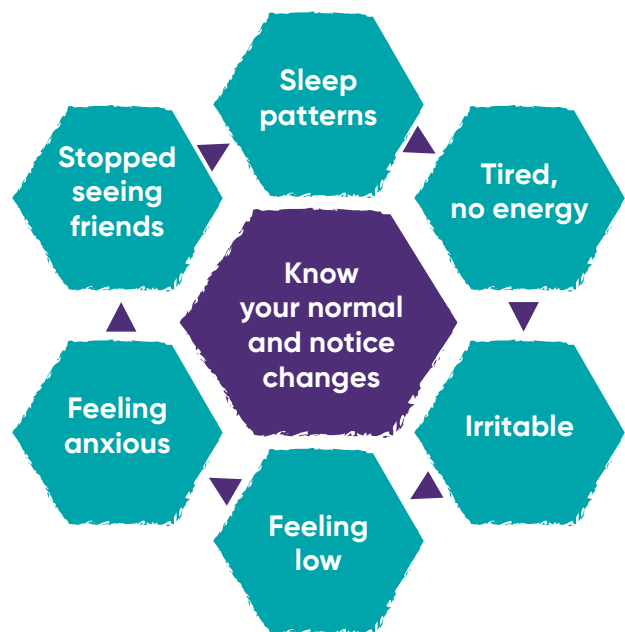
It's normal to experience different emotions, although not everyone will show them in the same way. Some emotions are harder to talk about than others. Anger is very common – anger at yourself or at the person who died. When someone has been ill, or you have been their carer you may feel relief when they die (e.g. that they are no longer in pain) but this sometimes gets mixed with guilt as it may not feel OK to say you are relieved.

Some people will want to talk about their loss and others may need time alone. It is common to go over and over events and you may see the person or feel their presence. Simple tasks that you did easily before, may be harder and someone who has been bereaved may find it difficult to concentrate or feel confused. All of this is normal following a bereavement.

## No timeline for grief

You may wonder 'how long will I be grieving for?' and friends may ask if things are 'getting back to normal' after a while. There is no set timeline for how long someone will grieve – and again that is normal and will depend on your individual circumstances. In general, it is probably longer than you think.

If you are supporting someone who has been bereaved, it is helpful to remember that while life may be going back to normal for you it may not be for the person who is bereaved, and they may still need support. Also, grief can revisit you at any time. It may be an anniversary, a piece of music, finding an object that belongs to your loved one or another bereavement that reminds you and you may feel a wave of grief come over you again.



## Two steps forward, one step back

Just as there is no set timeline for grief, many people report that it feels like some days you are making progress and others feel like you are right back at the beginning. This can be confusing and disheartening.

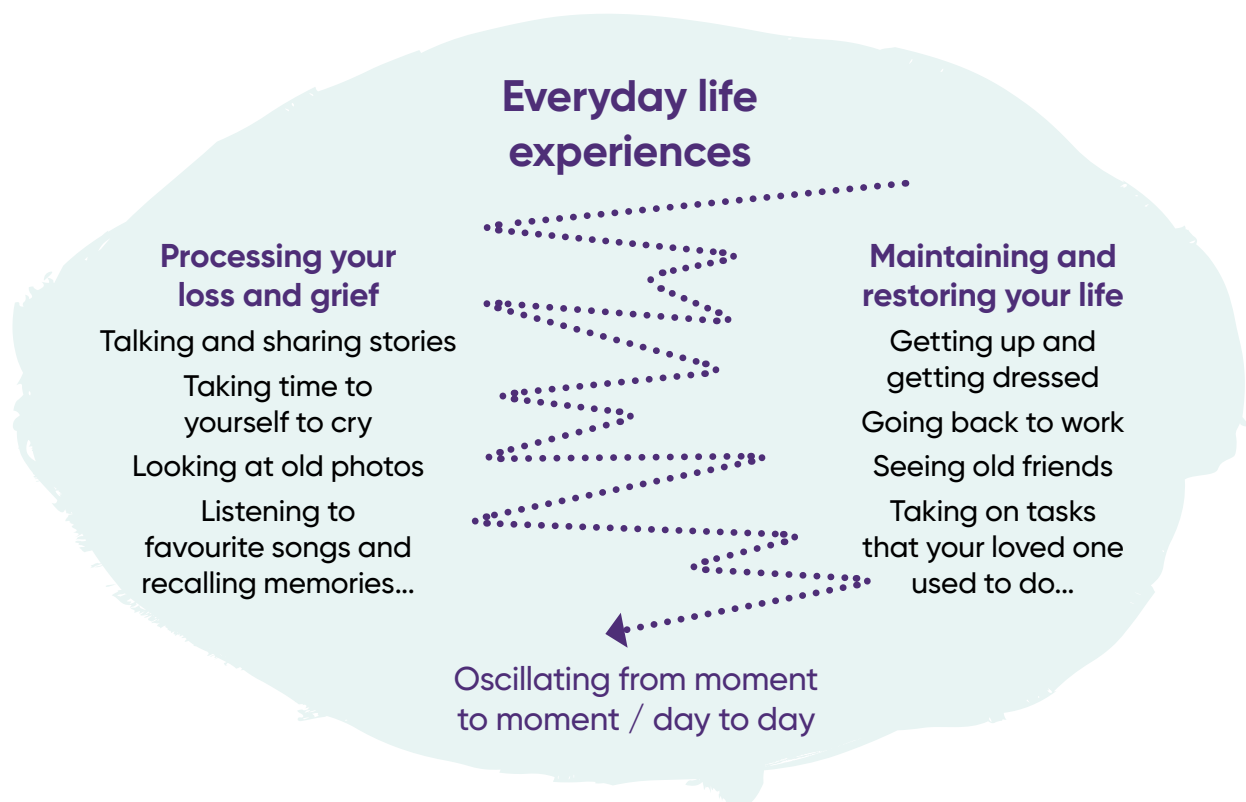
The diagram below shows how you can come to terms with your loss. To grieve in a healthy way you need to work on two aspects of your life:

- On one hand you need to process the grief which may include talking to friends and sharing stories, taking time to yourself to cry, looking at old photos, listening to favourite songs and recalling memories of your life together.
- On the other hand you need to carry on with your life and piece a new life together without the one you cared for in it including getting up each day and getting dressed, going back to work, seeing old friends and taking on new tasks that your loved one used to do.



But you cannot do both at the same time, so you bounce or oscillate between the two, often triggered by a date, memory, object or smell that reminds you of your loved one.

Some people describe the days when you are rebuilding your life as 'good days' or a step forward, and the days when you are focusing on your grief as 'bad days' or a step back. If instead you see both as a necessary part your journey then it may be easier to see them both as progress and this can be less disheartening.



## Growing around grief

Another common statement you will hear about grief is that it gets less painful and shrinks over time. Growing around grief (see diagram below) is a model created by grief counsellor Lois Tonkin after speaking to a client about the death of their child. She said that at first grief filled every part of her life; it was all consuming.

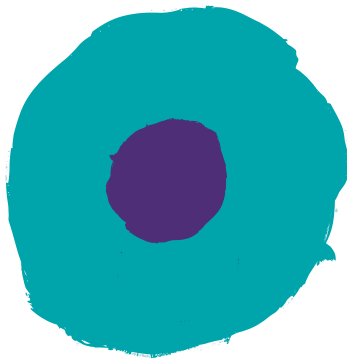
She thought that as time went by the grief would shrink and become a much smaller part of her life. But what happened was different. The grief stayed just as big, but her life grew around it. There were times where she felt the grief as intensely as when her child first died. But there were other times where she felt she lived her life in the space outside the circle.

This view of grief does not tell you that your grief will go away in time. You will never be 'over it'. It acknowledges that there will be some days where you feel grief as strongly as you did when the person first died. But there will also be days when you are able to move on with other parts of your life. Sometimes you may feel guilty about this, as if it is disloyal to the person who has died.

This 'understanding grief' model shows how we can still grieve the loss of our loved one while carrying on with our own lives. It shows that we can grow a new life which includes the loss.



**People tend to believe that  
grief shrinks over time**



**What really happens in that  
we grow around our grief**



# Strategies for looking after yourself

It is normal to have some days when you need more help and to be kinder to yourself than others.

Some ways you can support yourself can be short, 'in the moment' things – like taking a minute to focus on your breathing. Others work best when you build them into your daily routine – like eating, sleeping and staying connected to people. Here are a few tips that may help:

## Talk to someone

Staying connected and sharing your feelings and concerns with friends and family can be helpful, even over the phone, internet, or social media. It can be comforting to share memories and stories of times you all spent together. You might also be able to talk to someone in your community, or to a faith or spiritual leader.



## Develop a helpful mindset

Sometimes we are our own worst enemies – pushing on and telling ourselves we need to be strong for everyone else. Grieving can be tiring and it's OK to take time and give yourself permission to grieve in your own way. Try to set boundaries and stick to them. Focus on what you can manage and accept that you are doing your best. Some days you will have more energy than others and that's normal, so take one day at a time. Some people find writing down their thoughts and feelings in a journal can help them process what they are experiencing.



## Diet and sleep

It's harder to think straight when you are tired so try to get some sleep – or at least rest if you can't sleep. Your body and your mind need fuel so even when you don't feel like eating try to keep your energy levels up.



## Routine

Life can feel chaotic when you have been bereaved and having a routine may be the last thing on your mind. Focus on the basics of sleeping, eating and exercising and staying connected to others. Doing small things regularly can be easier than setting yourself huge goals – some days just getting up and getting dressed can be a challenge.



## Exercise

Regular exercise can help you relax and improve your mood. Even gentle movement like a short walk in the fresh air can improve your sleep and your physical wellbeing.



## Reach out for help

Bereavement can leave you feeling isolated. You may feel that nobody else understands what you are going through – but you don't have to be alone with your grief. Community support groups or organisations such as Cruse Bereavement Support will listen and help you understand and come to terms with your grief.



# Spotting the signs and signposting

Unresolved grief can lead to both physical and mental health problems, loneliness and isolation.

## Signs that you may need more help

Sometimes grief can be more complicated, and people can feel stuck. More information can be found on the Cruse website at [cruse.org.uk](https://www.cruse.org.uk). Please enter "complicated grief" in the search function in the top left corner.

Here are some of the signs to look out for:

- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability, anger, worry, fear or sadness...
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Losing interest in what you used to love
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Less interested in your appearance or personal care
- Struggling to carry out normal daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- Changes in work performance
- Thinking about suicide

Seeking support during difficult times is crucial for maintaining emotional and social well-being. If the impact of grief persists and starts to impact your ability to lead a normal life, friends and family may not be able to provide the level of support you need. At times like these, organisations like Cruse Bereavement Support can help. Their services provide emotional support and guidance to help you through the grieving process. For more information, visit the Cruse website.

There are also other organisations which can help with a range of different issues, please search for "signposting" on Cruse's website [cruse.org.uk](https://www.cruse.org.uk) to find out more.

**If you are experiencing difficult thoughts please call Samaritans on 116-123 or speak with your health care provider.**

