GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

PLATINUM HEALTH



Grief

Grief is a natural, yet painful response to loss. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, but there are healthy ways to cope with the pain and express your emotions in ways that allow you to heal.

You may associate grief with the death of a loved one, but any loss can cause grief, including the loss of a relationship, your health, your job, or a cherished dream. After a significant loss, you may experience all kinds of difficult and surprising emotions, such as shock, anger, and guilt.

Coping with Grief and Loss

Coping with the loss of someone or something you love is one of life's biggest challenges. Often, the pain of loss can feel overwhelming. You may experience all kinds of difficult and unexpected emotions, from shock or anger to disbelief, guilt, and profound sadness. The pain of grief can also disrupt your physical health, making it difficult to sleep, eat, or even think straight. These are normal reactions to significant loss. But while there is no right or wrong way to grieve, there are healthy ways to cope with the pain that, in time, can ease your sadness and help you come to terms with your loss, find new meaning, and move on with your life.



What is grief?

Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. The more significant the loss, the more intense your grief will be. You may associate grieving with the death of a loved one - which is often the cause of the most intense type of grief - but any loss can cause grief, including:

- Divorce or relationship breakup.
- Loss of health.
- Losing a job.
- Loss of financial stability.
- A miscarriage.
- Retirement.
- Death of a pet.
- Loss of a cherished dream.
- A loved one's serious illness.
- Loss of a friendship.
- Loss of safety after a trauma.
- Selling the family home.

Even subtle losses in life can trigger a sense of grief. For example, you might grieve after moving away from home, graduating from college, or changing jobs. Whatever your loss, it's personal to you, so don't feel ashamed about how you feel, or believe that it's somehow only appropriate to grieve for certain things. If the person, animal, relationship, or situation was significant to you, it's normal to grieve the loss you're experiencing. Whatever the cause of your grief, though, there are healthy ways to deal with the pain and eventually come to terms with your loss.





The grieving process

Grieving is a highly individual experience; there's no right or wrong way to grieve. How you grieve depends on many factors, including your personality and coping style, your life experience, your faith, and how significant the loss was to you.

Inevitably, the grieving process takes time. Healing happens gradually; it can't be forced or hurried - and there is no "normal" timetable for grieving. Some people start to feel better in weeks or months. For others, the grieving process is measured in years. Whatever your grief experience, it's important to be patient with yourself and allow the process to naturally unfold.

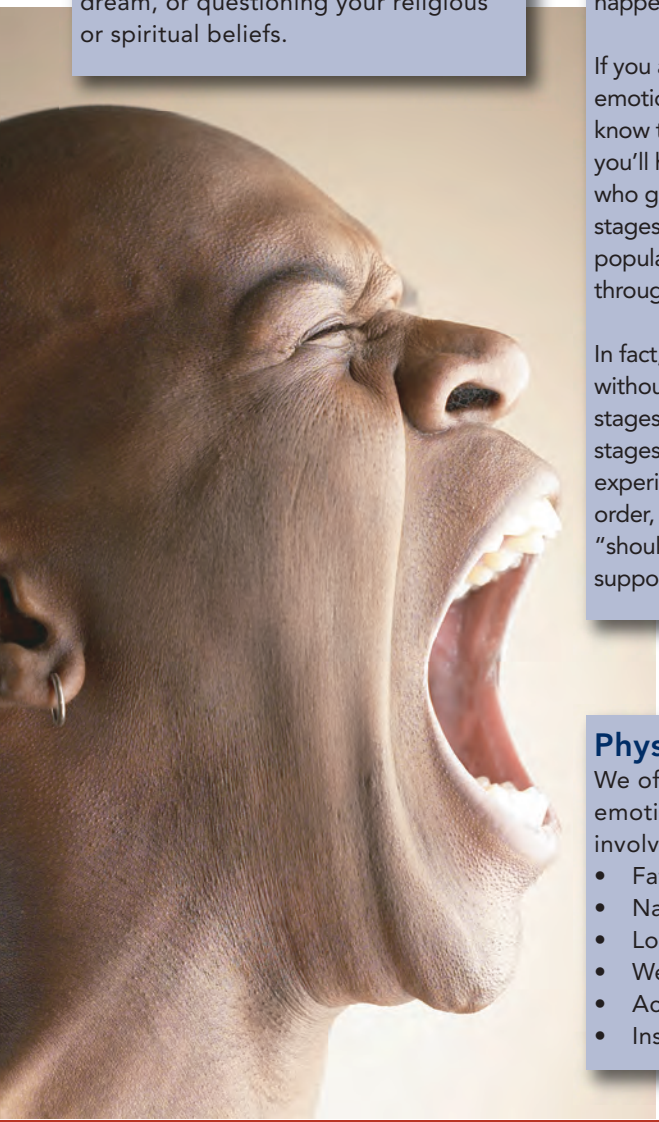
How to deal with the grieving process

While grieving a loss is an inevitable part of life, there are ways to help cope with the pain, come to terms with your grief, and eventually, find a way to pick up the pieces and move on with your life.

- Acknowledge your pain.
- Accept that grief can trigger many different and unexpected emotions.
- Understand that your grieving process will be unique to you.
- Seek out face-to-face support from people who care about you.
- Support yourself emotionally by taking care of yourself physically.
- Recognise the difference between grief and depression.

Symptoms of grief

While loss affects people in different ways, many of us experience the following symptoms when we're grieving. Just remember that almost anything that you experience in the early stages of grief is normal - including feeling like you're going crazy, feeling like you're in a bad dream, or questioning your religious or spiritual beliefs.



The five stages of grief

Denial: "This can't be happening to me."
Anger: "Why is this happening? Who is to blame?"
Bargaining: "Make this not happen, and in return I will ____."
Depression: "I'm too sad to do anything."
Acceptance: "I'm at peace with what happened."

If you are experiencing any of these emotions following a loss, it may help to know that your reaction is normal and that you'll heal in time. However, not everyone who grieves goes through all of these stages - and that's okay. Contrary to popular belief, you do not have to go through each stage in order to heal.

In fact, some people resolve their grief without going through any of these stages. And if you do go through these stages of grief, you probably won't experience them in a neat, sequential order, so don't worry about what you "should" be feeling or which stage you're supposed to be in.

Physical symptoms of grief

We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including:

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Lowered immunity
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Aches and pains
- Insomnia

Emotional symptoms of grief

Shock and disbelief. Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting them to show up, even though you know they're gone.

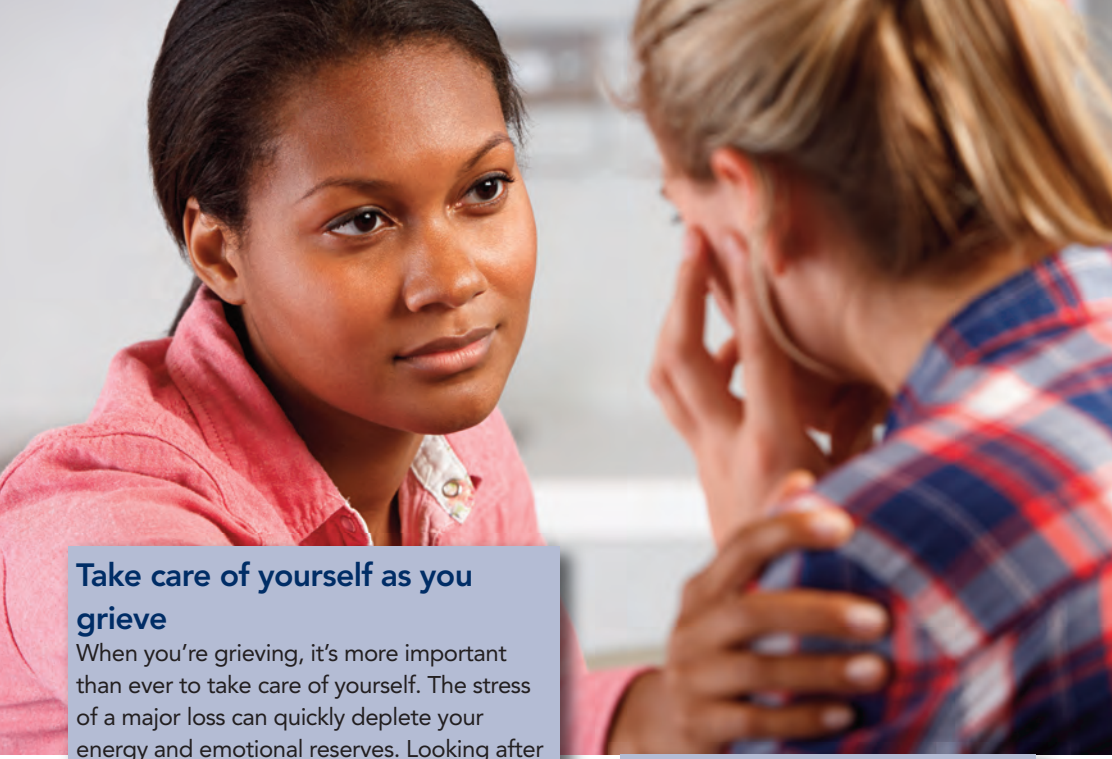
Sadness. Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.

Guilt. You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more you could have done.

Anger. Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry with yourself, God, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you.

Fear. A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.





Take care of yourself as you grieve

When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

Face your feelings

You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.

Finding a Therapist Who Can Help You Heal

Talk to a Platinum Health therapist if your grief feels like too much to bear. Platinum Health therapists are available at most Platinum Health facilities. They can help you work through intense emotions and overcome obstacles to your grieving.

Seek support for grief and loss

The pain of grief can often cause you to want to withdraw from others and retreat into your shell. But having the face-to-face support of other people is vital to healing from loss. Even if you're not comfortable talking about your feelings under normal circumstances, it's important to express them when you're grieving.

While sharing your loss can make the burden of grief easier to carry, that doesn't mean that every time you interact with friends and family, you need to talk about your loss. Comfort can also come from just being around others who care about you. The key is not to isolate yourself.

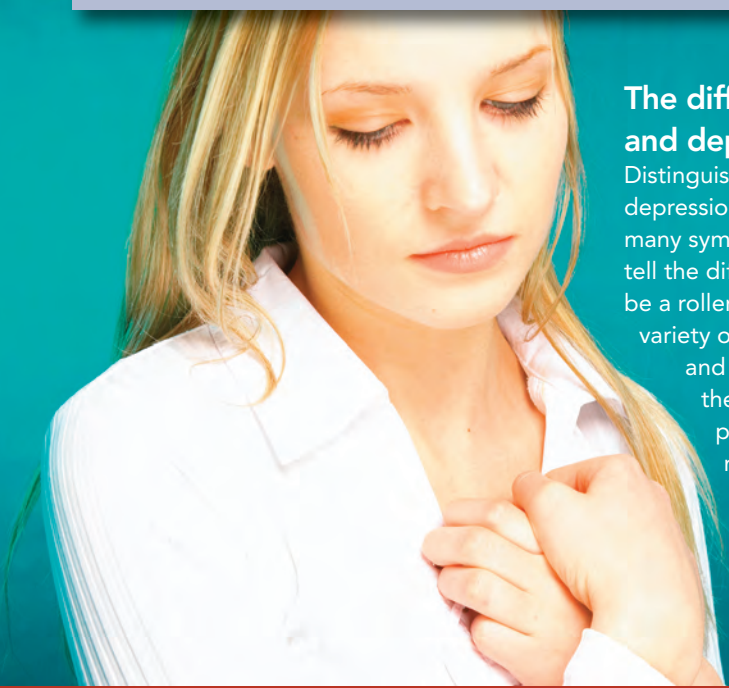
Complicated grief

The sadness of losing someone you love never goes away completely, but it shouldn't remain center stage. If the pain of the loss is so constant and severe that it keeps you from resuming your life, you may be suffering from a condition known as complicated grief. Complicated grief is like being stuck in an intense state of mourning. You may have trouble accepting the death long after it has occurred or be so preoccupied with the person who died that it disrupts your daily routine and undermines your other relationships.

Symptoms of complicated grief include:

- Intense longing and yearning for your deceased loved one.
- Intrusive thoughts or images of your loved one.
- Denial of the death or sense of disbelief.
- Imagining that your loved one is alive.
- Searching for your deceased loved one in familiar places.
- Avoiding things that remind you of your loved one.
- Extreme anger or bitterness over your loss.
- Feeling that life is empty or meaningless.

If your loved one's death was sudden, violent, or otherwise extremely stressful or disturbing, complicated grief can manifest as psychological trauma or PTSD. If your loss has left you feeling helpless and struggling with upsetting emotions, memories, and anxiety that won't go away, you may have been traumatised. But with the right guidance, you can make healing changes and move on with your life.



The difference between grief and depression

Distinguishing between grief and clinical depression isn't always easy as they share many symptoms, but there are ways to tell the difference. Remember, grief can be a roller coaster. It involves a wide variety of emotions and a mix of good and bad days. Even when you're in the middle of the grieving process, you will still have moments of pleasure or happiness. With depression, on the other hand, the feelings of emptiness and despair are constant.

Depression Symptoms and Warning Signs: Recognising Depression and Getting Help

Other symptoms that suggest depression, not just grief, include:

- Intense, pervasive sense of guilt.
- Thoughts of suicide or a preoccupation with dying.
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness.
- Slow speech and body movements.
- Inability to function at home, work, and/or school.
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there.

When to seek professional help for grief

If you're experiencing symptoms of complicated grief or clinical depression, talk to a Platinum Health mental health professional right away. Left untreated, complicated grief and depression can lead to significant emotional damage, life-threatening health problems, and even suicide. But treatment can help you get better.

Contact a professional therapist if you:

- Feel like life isn't worth living.
- Wish you had died with your loved one.
- Blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it.
- Feel numb and disconnected from others for more than a few weeks.
- Are having difficulty trusting others since your loss.
- Are unable to perform your normal daily activities.



Platinum Health's Mental Health Services (MHS) can assist with grief and bereavement counselling. Therapists are available at most Platinum Health facilities and no referral or authorisation number is required to access the service. Contact MHS on 014 590 1700 to establish where to access the service. Employees who qualify for the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) may access the service via their HR Department or any Platinum Health facility.