

Befriending Grief

Grief is a natural response to loss. We all experience some form of loss and grief in our lives, but we're not always taught how to navigate the complicated and overwhelming feelings that come with it.

There are many different forms of loss that a person can experience.

Some examples of loss include:

- Death of a loved one, friend or pet
- Going through a break-up
- Divorce in the family
- Moving to a different school and losing your old community
- Loss of a friendship
- Diagnosis of an illness
- Injury
- Losing a job or place on a team
- Being bullied and excluded
- Climate change
- Natural disasters
- Loss of a sense of safety after trauma

Sometimes, we can feel a sense of grief without knowing why. Sometimes, we can feel a collective sense of loss, such as many of us felt during the pandemic. Loss can also be experienced by witnessing social injustice, such as during the Black Lives Matter protests. Another example of collective loss is feeling grief at the history of colonization and residential schools in Canada.

It is important to remember that everyone experiences loss differently. While there isn't one "right" way of grieving, here are some suggestions that can be helpful for working with and befriending grief.

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Acknowledgment: Difficult emotions, especially emotions as intense as grief, can naturally make us want to tune out and ignore our feelings. While taking time to do something distracting that takes our mind off our grief can be necessary, it's also important to allow ourselves to fully feel and express the loss. It's easy to want to minimize what we're feeling, to think that other people have it worse, or that we've been grieving for "too long." But there is no timeline for grieving, and it's important to have compassion for the intense feelings that come up. Try befriending these feelings and acknowledging them rather than pushing them away.

Seek Compassionate Support: Find people who can hold space for you. This can mean surrounding yourself with people who allow you to express what you're feeling without needing to fix or change it. Maybe that person is a friend or family member who understands your plight. Counselors and therapists can also be great at helping you process and understand what you're going through, and often have helpful strategies for working through grief. Sometimes people can feel awkward supporting someone who is grieving because we're not always taught how to do this well. Finding compassionate people who know how to be with you in your grief makes such a difference.

Remembrance: If you have lost someone important in your life, finding moments to remember them and honor their memory can be therapeutic and help you feel connected to them. The difference between grief and mourning is that mourning is active. It's how we demonstrate our love for the person that we lost. Mourning can look like writing a poem, attending a funeral, bringing flowers to a grave, writing a tribute on social media, or coming up with your own celebration or ritual that is meaningful to you. Sharing your favourite memories about your loved one and finding people who encourage you to talk about them can also be really helpful.

Make Time for Yourself: Loss is a challenging thing to come to terms with and can



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bring up so many different emotions such as anger, despair, guilt, sadness, shame, rage, and more. Be patient with yourself and take care of your needs. Find outlets to express some of these emotions through different avenues such as music, writing, art, dance, sports and other activities that bring you joy and connect you to your body and your feelings. Perhaps you need to ask for extensions for your assignments at school, or take some time off from extracurricular activities. Asking for what you need is a big part of taking care of yourself.

There are many different forms of loss—from losing a loved one to losing a dream, a community, a job, a relationship, or a sense of safety. Grief is a powerful emotion that demands extra nurturing and self-care. Acknowledge all the complex feelings you might be experiencing and learn to sit with and express those feelings. If you've lost a loved one, finding ways of remembering them, talking about them and honoring what they mean to you can be particularly therapeutic. And remember to seek support from people who understand what you're going through and allow you the time and space you need to grieve.

