



## Grief Waves and Anniversary Reactions

An explainer, grief wave tracker, and anniversary plan · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)

© 2026 Insightful Journey Inc. All rights reserved. Free for personal use. Not for resale or redistribution.

### At a glance

- Grief doesn't move in neat stages. It comes and goes in waves.
- Anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays can bring grief back strongly, even years later.
- Moving between grieving and living is healthy. It's how people cope with loss.

### Beyond the "stages" of grief

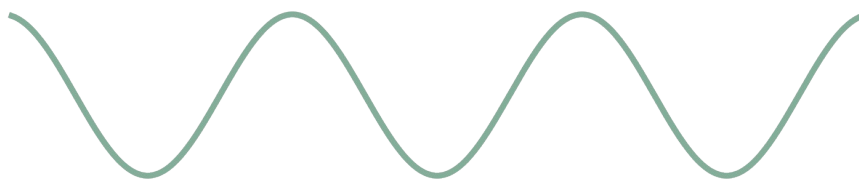
Many people have heard of the five stages of grief, but research suggests grief is rarely that orderly. The Dual Process Model describes healthy grief as moving back and forth between two kinds of coping: facing the loss, and adjusting to life after it.

#### LOSS-ORIENTED

Crying, remembering, missing them, looking at photos, feeling the pain

#### RESTORATION-ORIENTED

Daily tasks, new routines and roles, rest, distraction, moments of joy



Healthy grieving moves back and forth between both. This is called oscillation.

Both are needed. Constantly avoiding grief can make it harder, but so can never taking a break from it.

### Anniversary reactions

As an anniversary or meaningful date approaches, it's common to feel more tearful, tired, irritable, or unsettled, sometimes before you consciously remember the date. Your body often remembers. These reactions are a normal part of grief, not a sign that you're "going backward."

### What the research says

The Dual Process Model of coping with bereavement describes healthy grieving as oscillating between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping (Stroebe & Schut, 1999).

Most bereaved people show resilience over time, though grief can resurface around significant dates.

### Tool: My Grief Wave Tracker and Anniversary Plan

| Day | What brought a wave (a memory, a song, a date) | Intensity (0–10) | What helped me through |
|-----|------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Mon |                                                |                  |                        |
| Tue |                                                |                  |                        |
| Wed |                                                |                  |                        |
| Thu |                                                |                  |                        |
| Fri |                                                |                  |                        |
| Sat |                                                |                  |                        |
| Sun |                                                |                  |                        |

### My anniversary plan

The date(s) that may be hard for me:

---

How I want to honour my loved one (a ritual, visit, meal, prayer, donation, sharing stories):

---

Who I want with me, or who I'll let know:

---

How I'll care for myself before, on, and after the day:

## Strategies to try

- **Allow the waves.** Let yourself feel grief when it comes, and take breaks when you need them.
- **Keep connection.** Many people find comfort in continuing bonds, such as talking to, writing to, or honouring the person.
- **Plan ahead for hard dates.** Knowing what you'll do can ease anticipation.
- **Honour cultural and faith traditions.** Rituals can offer structure and meaning.
- **Be patient.** There is no timeline for grief.

## Strategies you may not have heard of

These less common, evidence-informed techniques go beyond the usual advice. Try one at a time and notice what works for you.

- **Write a letter, and a reply.** Write a letter to your loved one. Then write the reply you imagine they would send. Many people find this meaningful and comforting.
- **Dose your grief.** If grief feels overwhelming all day, set aside 20 minutes daily to intentionally grieve: look at photos, cry, remember. This can make the rest of the day more manageable.
- **Start a legacy project.** Plant a garden, cook their recipes, or continue a cause they cared about.
- **Keep a linking object.** Carry or wear something that connects you to them, like a ring, scarf, or photo.

## Journal prompts

Take your time with these. Write freely; there are no right answers.

**What do I miss most about the person I've lost?**

---

**What would I want to say to them today?**

---

**How has grief changed over time for me?**

---

## What part of them do I carry with me?

---

### When to reach out for support

If grief feels as intense as it did at the beginning many months later, keeps you from daily life, or you feel hopeless, a therapist can help. Support is available in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

*In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.*

*This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.*

## References

Klass, D., Silverman, P. R., & Nickman, S. L. (Eds.). (1996). Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief. Taylor & Francis.

Stroebe, M., & Schut, H. (1999). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: Rationale and description. *Death Studies*, 23(3), 197–224.

## Usage Notice

© 2026 Insightful Journey Inc. All rights reserved.

This resource is intended for personal growth and education purposes only. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, shared, or distributed in any form, digital or printed, without prior written consent from Insightful Journey Inc.

This material is the intellectual property of Insightful Journey Inc. and may not be modified, resold, or integrated into other programs or publications.

For permissions or clinical use inquiries, please contact: [info@insightfuljourney.ca](mailto:info@insightfuljourney.ca)

**Insightful Journey Inc. | [www.insightfuljourney.ca](http://www.insightfuljourney.ca)**