

Types of Grief



Grief is a natural response to loss, but it does not look the same for everyone. People may experience a wide range of emotional, physical, and behavioural reactions depending on the nature of the loss, personal coping style, and social context. Recognising the different types of grief can help individuals, families, and professionals identify what is happening, validate experiences, and provide appropriate support.

Uncomplicated Grief

This is the typical emotional response to loss, which gradually lessens over time.

Common feelings: sadness, yearning, guilt, anger, and confusion.

Usually allows the person to continue with daily life while gradually adjusting to the loss.

Complicated (or Prolonged) Grief

Grief that remains intense, disruptive, or debilitating long after the loss.

Can involve persistent longing, difficulty accepting the death, or avoidance of reminders.

Often interferes with daily functioning, relationships, or work.

Anticipatory Grief

Grief experienced before a loss occurs, usually in cases of terminal illness or expected death.

Allows individuals to prepare emotionally, but can also involve guilt or helplessness.

Common in families caring for someone with a chronic or terminal condition.

Chronic Grief

Similar to complicated grief but tends to last for years without significant reduction in intensity.

The person may feel “stuck” in mourning, unable to move forward or adapt to life after the loss.

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Secondary Grief

Grief that arises as a consequence of another loss or major life change.

For example, losing a job may trigger grief over the loss of identity, routine, or social connections.

Absent Grief

Grief that is not outwardly expressed or recognised, either by the individual or others.

May be due to societal expectations, personal denial, or lack of awareness of the loss.

Can resurface later in unexpected ways, sometimes through anxiety or depression.

Cumulative Grief

Grief that occurs when multiple losses happen in a short period, without time to fully process each one.

Can intensify emotional strain, making coping more challenging.

Disenfranchised Grief

Grief that is not socially acknowledged or validated.

Examples: loss of a pet, miscarriage, estranged relationship, or loss of a friend.

Can lead to feelings of isolation or guilt because others may not recognise the grief as legitimate.

Grief is a highly individual experience, and there is no “right” or “wrong” way to mourn. Understanding the different types of grief can help normalise emotional responses, identify when extra support might be needed, and guide compassionate self-care or professional intervention. Recognising your own grief, or supporting someone else through theirs, is an important step towards healing and adjustment after a loss.