

5 WAYS TO COPE WITH

LOSS AND OVERCOME GRIEF





INTRODUCTION

Experiencing the loss of a loved one - be it a partner, friend, relative or beloved animal companion - is an unavoidable part of life. At some point, we have all had to, or will have to, say goodbye to someone we treasure deeply. Dealing with the loss of someone close can leave you feeling completely overwhelmed. It's one of life's toughest, most stressful challenges and the complex feelings of pain you experience can all be classified as grief.

Death, by its very nature, puts life into question. It gives meaning to our existence by reminding us how precious life is. When a death occurs, we're forced to reconcile the past we cherished, with the future we counted on. A tangible void is left by our loved one's absence. How do you imagine life without them while honouring the memories you shared? How can you cope with your loss and heal your emotional wounds?

In this book, you'll gain a better understanding of grief, insight on which emotions you are likely to encounter during the grieving process, as well as 5 ways to deal with your loss and grief. You can use these strategies to help you cope with your loss and move towards acceptance.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Rae". The signature is stylized and cursive.

James Rae
'Talking Stones



Loss can be a powerful catalyst for change and positive growth. Nothing puts life in sharp perspective more than experiencing loss as a result of death. Your priorities may change and you may experience a deeper sense of compassion for others. Working through your grief and coming to terms with your loss may leave you feeling emboldened; ready to finally pursue the goals and aspirations in life that you've resisted in the past. Transformation occurs when you learn how to cope with loss by adopting the resultant life changes in ways that support your healing without forgetting your loved one.

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

The grief associated with losing someone close can affect your emotional, psychological and physical well-being. Death is often viewed as a difficult and uncomfortable subject to discuss. Despite it being an unavoidable part of life, people tend to spend most of their lives ignoring, avoiding and denying its inevitability. Most of us perceive grief as a sharp sense of sadness or an emotional pain that subsides in intensity over time. We expect the inevitable onslaught of tears, a rollercoaster of conflicting emotions and picking up the pieces in the aftermath of losing someone near and dear. However, it is important to remember that grief can be bittersweet. It can be a transformative life experience, one to be lived, shared and understood.

Everyone experiences grief differently

Grieving is an innately human experience, and how we each express our grief is as varied as our DNA. Despite our ingrained expectations, research overwhelmingly shows that there is no single, optimal way to grieve a loss. The grieving process takes time and should not be rushed. Healing takes place gradually and it's important to be patient with yourself and allow the process to naturally unfold.

Grief is unpredictable

Traditionally, grief has been described as a linear process which entails several steps that one needs to experience, resolve and move through in order to completely heal emotionally. Psychiatrist and author of *On Death and Dying*, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, is largely responsible for introducing what is commonly referred to as the “5 stages of grief”. These stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. According to this school of thought, you must work through each stage in sequence to be able to fully recover from your loss.

Despite this common-held belief, it isn't necessary to go through each stage in sequence for a person to be considered healed. Some people only go through a few stages, some don't experience them in sequence, whilst others resolve their grief without experiencing any stages at all. Grief doesn't operate in a framework. It is unpredictable; fickle at best and it doesn't move at a fixed pace. Don't worry about what you should be feeling, there is no right or wrong way to experience grief.

Grieving is a natural reaction to loss. Whilst there are no guaranteed ways to make bereavement easier, there are some strategies that you can use to help you cope with death and move toward acceptance.





01 ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR FEELINGS

Grieving is an extremely personal experience. Loss affects each of us in different ways, but the following emotions are commonly felt. You should expect to feel flooded with varied and often conflicting emotions.

Some emotions you may experience include:

- Denial and disbelief
- Shock and confusion
- Sadness and yearning
- Anger
- Guilt
- Despair

Your mood might fluctuate, you might feel like you're going crazy or stuck in a bad dream, but understand that what you are feeling is perfectly normal – especially in the early stages of bereavement. Be assured that these responses to grief are healthy and appropriate; they will ultimately assist you with coming to terms with your loss.

Acknowledge your feelings, be gentle and patient with yourself. In time, your mood will become more stable and your emotions less erratic. It is important to be able to identify and acknowledge your feelings. This emotional awareness can help you manage your responses and can help you support others who are grieving.



We run from grief because it scares us, yet our hearts reach towards grief because the broken parts want to mend.



02 TALK TO SOMEONE

Rather than isolate yourself, grieve with others. Talking with others who are also experiencing the loss may assist you with coming to terms with what happened and help you determine your path forward. The loss of a loved one can change the course of your life irrevocably. In their absence your life story changes. Long-held roles are suddenly altered. Relationships shift. Daily routines are modified. There's a character missing; one that's impossible to replace. Now your story has to be rewritten in a way that celebrates the good memories you have. By speaking out and sharing your experience with family or friends who were close to your lost loved one, you can reshape the narrative in a way that honours their spirit and memory.

Listening to others can help you heal

Talking to someone about your loss is a great way to receive and provide emotional support in the aftermath of your loved one's passing. Some people find comfort in stepping up and providing a shoulder to lean on for others who are also grieving. You may find that adopting a supportive role for a bereaved friend or family member can assist you in coming to terms with your own grief.

Remember it's important to share your experience of loss with others. It encourages you to acknowledge your feelings and provides an outlet to share memories about your loved one. Don't try to bottle up your emotions for the sake of others. Whether it's out of embarrassment, or because you fear that you will alienate yourself from others, when you suppress your emotions and retreat into isolation, you simply make it more challenging for yourself in the long run.

Be sure to look for others for support. If friends and family are not immediately available to you, consider seeing a grief counsellor or joining a support group.



03 TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

The shock of losing someone dear can have a significant impact on your body - affecting your mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Whilst you are grieving, it may be hard to find enjoyment in life or to face your daily responsibilities. It is critical that you take care of yourself both physically and emotionally during this sensitive time. You might struggle to find the motivation to complete basic tasks, experience a loss of appetite, battle with maintaining personal hygiene or experience a disruption in your sleep routine. These are normal reactions to grief; however, if left unaddressed, these factors can negatively affect your health and wellbeing.

Although self-care is hugely personal and specific to your individual needs, there are a number of useful strategies that you can use to manage your physical and psychological health.

Get enough sleep: Allow yourself to get enough rest. While you are sleeping, your body and mind uses this time to recover and regenerate itself. Getting adequate sleep is essential for your body to effectively combat stress and helps to regulate your mood. This contributes to maintaining a healthy and balanced outlook on life, making it easier for you to focus on the potential of each new day.

Eat a healthy diet and exercise: The mind and body are interconnected. This means that if your body is physically nourished you will be better equipped to deal with the emotional strain of coming to terms with your loss. Try and eat a balanced diet to replenish your body's energy reserves. Often we ignore the significant physical impact that our emotions have on our bodies. Be mindful of what your body needs.

By eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly you can combat stress and fatigue. Maintaining your existing exercise routine will help you stick to your normal schedule and keep you motivated. This doesn't necessarily mean diving headfirst into an intensive gym program. It can be as simple as taking a walk or getting out in the sunshine. Yoga and meditating are both excellent practices that assist with healing by bringing your awareness back to your body and mind.

Maintain daily routines: Do your best to stick with your daily routine, including hobbies and activities. There is comfort in familiarity and you might find some relief in continuing your regular activities. This helps you stay motivated and focussed on the positive areas in your life. You might find it difficult to keep to your regular schedule at first; this is normal and to be expected. During the early stage of the grieving process, consider asking a friend or family member to accompany you on one of your regular activities. This can make it easier for you to stick with your routine, help you connect with others and remind you of the joy that your hobbies and interests bring.

If you've experienced the loss of your cherished family pet and you are missing the routine of your daily stroll with your dog, it may be useful to continue using that time to take a walk each day. Take your kids or partner along and use the time to share your favourite memories of your treasured pet.

Avoid using drugs and alcohol: You may be tempted to use drugs and alcohol to numb the pain, distract you from your emotions and provide a temporary escape. This is an unhealthy approach to dealing with grief as it can delay your emotional healing and lead to physical dependence and destructive habits.



I have learned that
grief is another
name for

love!





04

SEEK ADDITIONAL HELP IF YOU FEEL YOU NEED IT

Don't hesitate to seek counselling or professional help if you feel it's necessary. As everyone experiences grief differently, some people may have a harder time navigating the emotional fall-out that results in losing someone close to them. However, not everyone feels the need for professional help.

Remember, there is no shame in asking for help, especially when you are grieving and feeling at your most vulnerable. If you are experiencing intense grief, having trouble getting back into your normal routine or struggling to come to terms with life without your loved one months after they have passed, you should reach out to a grief counsellor or mental health practitioner for help.

Complicated Grief and Depression

Long-term yearning for a loved one that has passed, preoccupation with death, feelings of emptiness and resentment, intrusive thoughts and the inability to accept loss are symptoms of a condition referred to as complicated grief. When the intensity of the grief becomes overwhelming, impacts your ability to complete necessary daily tasks such as the general upkeep of your home and your personal hygiene, or you find that your performance at work is suffering, seek out professional help.

The grieving process is often compared to a roller coaster of various emotions, where one experiences a combination of good and bad days, as well as moments of blissful happiness and intense sadness. Depression, on the other hand, is the constant and pervasive feeling of despair, emptiness, worthlessness and guilt.

Complicated grief and depression are significant mental health issues that require the specialised support and expertise of mental health professionals. Do not put off seeking help, as these conditions can result in significant emotional scars, long-term psychological harm, the adoption of destructive coping mechanisms and even suicide if left untreated. Keep in mind that professional counselling and treatment can assist you with coming to terms with your loss, as well as equipping you with healthy coping mechanisms to use as you return your focus towards the future. The good news is that there is professional help available, and with the support of friends and family, you will get better and work through your grief.



The risk of love is loss,
and the price of loss is
grief. But the pain of grief
is only a shadow when
compared with the pain
of never risking

Love!





05

HONOUR THEIR MEMORY

Whether you're dealing with the significant loss of a partner, family member or friend, or coming to terms with the devastating death of a life-long and loyal animal companion, it's impossible to ignore the distinct void that is left behind in their absence. The fact that they are no longer around does not mean that their memory is forgotten. Celebrating your loved one's memory can assist you with coming to terms with your feelings.

Moving on doesn't mean forgetting

No one is asking you to suddenly disregard the impact that a lost loved one has had on your life and by no means are your memories expected to conveniently and quietly vanish over time. Moving on simply means that you've come to terms with your loss and that's not the same as forgetting.

Coping with loss is not about closure, you don't simply get over it. Your past doesn't get wiped clean of their memory, no matter how much time passes. We don't simply leave the ones we've loved and lost behind. Instead, it is important to honour the spirit of your loved one by finding thoughtful ways to weave their legacy into your life in a manner that allows you to heal without forgetting.



Meaningful ways to honour their memory

There are numerous ways of celebrating and honouring the life of your loved one. It may take the shape of an intimate ceremony or you may decide to create your own ritual that reminds you of what brought joy to the person you've lost. Perhaps you prefer the permanence of a beautifully crafted memorial stone to provide you with a physical reminder that marks a special place where you can go to from time to time to remember their spirit. You may even want to join or start a campaign that champions a cause that your loved one was passionate about. If you've lost someone due to illness, you may find solace in raising awareness about the disease. You can plant a tree or run a marathon in their honour. Choose a special and personal way to honour their memory, one that resonates with your belief system.

Finding ways to honour the spirit and celebrate the life of the one you've lost not only gives you the means of saying your final farewell but it also provides you with a meaningful connection to them. This is a critical part of your journey through the grieving process, as it allows you to move past your pain and progress towards a new chapter of your life.

This is a powerful coping mechanism that allows you to move forward and can change the way you perceive and experience grief. By keeping your loved one's memory alive, you are honouring the important part they played in your life.

Their memory becomes a part of you. As you move through life, these memories become more meaningful and can end up playing a significant role in defining who you are and shaping your life story.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

The following resources can be used to provide you with assistance and support during your grieving process.

Counselling Directories and Grief Information

Australian Centre For Grief and Bereavement:

Grief information and counselling services in Australia for adults and children experiencing loss and grief.

Call 03 9265 2100 or visit grief.org.au

Wings of Hope:

Provides support and information for those grieving the loss of someone as a result of suicide.

Visit wingsofhope.org.au

Beyond Blue - Depression and Anxiety Support Service:

Provides support and information to Australian suffering with anxiety and depression.

Call 1300 224 636 or visit beyondblue.org.au

My Grief Assist:

Information on loss and grief.

Visit mygriefassist.com.au



Memorial Stones and Plaques

Talking Stones: offers a wide range of beautifully crafted, hand-engraved memorial stones and plaques for people and pets. Proudly produced in Australia.
Call 1300 606 605 or visit talkingstones.com.au

Information on How to Plan a Funeral:

Funeral Advice

Provides advice on how to plan a funeral in Australia as well as a funeral service provider directory.

Visit funeraladvice.com.au

Pet Loss and Grief Counselling:

Pets and People

Provides grief counselling and support for people grieving the loss of their pet.

Visit petsandpeople.com.au





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