How grief can show up

Grief affects the whole person: feelings, body, mind and behaviour.

People are often frightened by the strength and variety of what they feel after a loss. All of the following are common.

Feelings

Sadness, yearning, anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, relief, numbness. Sometimes several at once. Sometimes none.

Body

Exhaustion, tightness in the chest or throat, a hollow stomach, aches, poor sleep, appetite changes, restlessness, getting ill more easily.

Thinking

Disbelief, confusion, poor memory and concentration, going over and over what happened, "if only".

Behaviour

Crying, or being unable to. Withdrawing, or keeping very busy. Searching for them. Avoiding reminders, or holding on to them.

Sensing them

Hearing their voice, feeling them near, dreaming of them. This is common and usually comforting.

Meaning and faith

Questioning beliefs. Asking "why?" Feeling life is pointless, or seeing what matters more clearly.

Things people rarely say out loud

- "I feel relieved, and I hate myself for it."
- "I am angry with them for leaving."
- "I cannot cry, and I think something is wrong with me."
- "I laughed today and felt terrible."
- "I am jealous of people who still have theirs."

Each of these is a normal part of grief.

Waves

Grief often comes in bursts, set off by a song, a smell, an empty chair, or nothing at all. In the early days the waves are close together. Over time there are longer gaps, though a big one can still knock you over years later.

What I have been noticing in myself

What has surprised me

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Looking after yourself while grieving

A checklist for looking after your body, your routine and your contact with people.

Name _____ Date _____

Grieving uses a great deal of energy. You do not need to do all of these. Tick what you are managing, and circle one or two to give more attention to.

Body

- [ ] Eating something at regular times
- [ ] Drinking water
- [ ] Getting some rest, even if sleep is poor
- [ ] A little movement or fresh air each day
- [ ] Keeping alcohol low
- [ ] Seeing my GP if I am run down

Routine

- [ ] Getting up and dressed
- [ ] One small task each day
- [ ] Some structure to the week
- [ ] Putting off big decisions where I can

People

- [ ] Letting someone know how I am really doing
- [ ] Accepting offers of help
- [ ] Saying no to things I cannot face
- [ ] Time with people who do not need me to be OK

Feelings

- [ ] Letting myself cry when it comes
- [ ] Letting myself laugh when it comes
- [ ] Taking breaks from grief without guilt
- [ ] Being as kind to myself as I would be to someone else

One thing I will do for myself each day this week

What helps most at the moment

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