

What does 'normal' grief look like?

Common questions people ask about grief are, "Is this normal?", "Am I normal?" And, "Is it normal to still feel like this?"

The answer to these questions is almost always, "Yes!" Losing someone close to you is a major life changing event.

Grief is a time of emotional upheaval, which can turn what is normal on its head. Things you would otherwise be concerned about are all very normal responses to grief.

When you are grieving, it is normal to,

- Have **strong feelings** of sadness, anger, guilt, and anxiety. In the early stages you can feel numb, like you are on autopilot.
- Have a **change in habits**. You may drink more, smoke more, eat more (or less). Your sleeping patterns can also change.
- **Feel more withdrawn** than usual. Most people will have a time, where they will tend to avoid being out, or meeting others. You may also feel more anxious than usual.
- Have **memory problems**, find it difficult to concentrate, or become more clumsy than usual.
- Keep **dwelling** on events leading up to the person's death, while finding it difficult to remember happy memories.
- Keep **mementos** of the person, such as pictures on the wall, or their room just the way it was.
- **Talk to the person** who died, telling them your news, asking for advice, saying how much they are missed.
- **Feel the presence of the person** who died. Often this is just a vague feeling. Some people



report a feeling they were touched by the person; usually as a light brushing sensation. A few people have seen them as a brief shadowy form, usually out of the corner of their eye.

This last one can cause the most worry. They are usually brief and happen infrequently. They are thought to be a kind of hallucination, although you may prefer an alternative explanation.

It is important to understand **everyone's experience of grief is unique to them**. You may notice some or all of the things I have talked about.

They *all* tend to diminish over time. How long this takes is very much an individual thing. **Grief does not work to a timetable.**

When grieving, rather than asking "Is it normal to feel like this?" To which the answer is "Where you are right now, yes," a more useful question is, "Do I need some help, so I can cope better with what I am going through?"

You might want to consider seeking additional help, if you are feeling stuck, or are feeling overwhelmed, and finding you are not coping with day to day life.