



## loss and grief . . . a simple explanation

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**When we hear the word grief**, we often make the immediate link with death. But there are many circumstances in our day to day life that create grief:

- Relationships – separation, divorce, boy/girlfriend breakup, broken friendship.
- Loss of role – jobless, retrenchment, retirement, ‘empty-nest’, becoming or ceasing being a carer
- Health issues - cancer diagnosis or other illness, loss of limb, sight, hearing, bodily function, infertility, disability.
- Loss of possessions – home, money, personal possessions through bankruptcy, natural disaster, divorce, gambling or addiction.
- Dementia - losing the person we once knew.
- Ageing - loss of independence, mobility, choices, eyesight, hearing and general good health.
- Loss of the future - unfulfilled hopes, plans and dreams.

**When we are grieving**, we are likely to be affected on four different levels. There’s no set pattern to follow or timetable for recovery. Here are some possible grief reactions:

<p><b>Emotions</b></p> <p>Sadness Guilt Anger Loneliness Isolation Emptiness Overwhelming loss Resentment</p>	<p><b>Thoughts</b></p> <p>Why me? I miss you so much How will I cope with this? I’m relieved it’s finally over I can’t believe it’s true I’ll never get over this Why did God let this happen? It’s not fair! Life is meaningless, I can’t go on.</p>
<p><b>Behaviours</b></p> <p>Crying Keeping busy, can’t sit still Talking about it all the time Aggressiveness, ‘snap’ easily Disinterest in usual things Withdrawal from others Panic attacks Lifestyle changes – smoking, drinking, eating or spending habits</p>	<p><b>Wellness</b></p> <p>Not eating/sleeping ‘Pain’ in chest, stomach, throat, arms No energy, feeling flat More susceptible to illness Skin complaints, rashes Headaches, migraine High blood pressure Generally ‘off balance’</p>

**When you are grieving**, you can help yourself by:

- Being real about how you feel – try not to pretend you are okay or hide your true feelings.
- Finding a way of expressing how you feel – talking to someone or writing in a journal.
- Accepting that grieving is nothing to be ashamed of – it’s all a necessary part of adapting to the changes in your life and learning how to manage what’s happened.
- Taking good care of yourself – even though you may not feel like it, gentle exercise, daily walks, eating regular small meals, relaxation, listening to music, massage . . . these are all positive ways of nurturing yourself.

**Doris Zagdanski** is a leading figure in modern day grief and loss education. Her seminars are included in vocational qualifications in Allied Health, Counselling and Funeral Directing. Her books and free factsheets are available at [www.allaboutgrief.com](http://www.allaboutgrief.com)