

Understanding Traumatic Grief

Grief is a deeply personal experience; the intensity and complexity can vary significantly depending on the nature of the loss. While all forms of grief are challenging, traumatic grief stands out due to its profound impact on both the mind and body. Traumatic grief occurs in response to a sudden, unexpected loss, such as an accident, a sudden illness, or as a result of violence and can lead to a range of intense emotional and physical responses.

Unlike anticipatory grief, which is experienced in anticipation of expected loss and allows for some preparation; traumatic grief can overwhelm the individual, leading to intense emotions and physical symptoms. Symptoms may include:

- Emotional numbness
- Fear for yourself or others
- Anxiety
- Difficulty sleeping
- Avoidance of reminders associated with the loss
- Shakiness, nausea, dry mouth, or loss of appetite
- Nightmares or flashbacks
- Distress due to escaping a situation relatively unharmed or unaffected, as compared to others (survivor's guilt).

These reactions are normal responses to abnormal situations.

A framework for Grief

Grief is not a one-size-fits-all experience. Rather than comparing your grief to others', it is important to focus on your own healing process. Following a routine can help you to feel safe and cared for. Keeping regular mealtimes and prioritising sleep may give you a greater capacity to regulate your emotions throughout the day.

The earlier you seek support, the quicker your recovery.

The “three C’s” is a framework that can support you to navigate grief:

- 1. Choose:** Even in the midst of grief, you retain the dignity of choice. Decide what you can handle – what events to attend, what activities to engage in, and what to decline. This can also help to empower a sense of control in what can feel like a helpless experience.
- 2. Connect:** Human beings are wired for connection. Grief can intensify feelings of loneliness, but it is crucial to stay connected with others. Be honest about your feelings when asked, as this openness fosters support and understanding.
- 3. Communicate:** Express your needs clearly. Let others know how they can support you, even if it feels awkward. Vulnerability in communication can be a powerful step toward healing.

Taking small, manageable steps as mentioned above, can help reduce the intensity of grief. Simplifying the process allows for gradual healing.

Moving Toward Healing

The phrase “moving on” from grief is a common one, but it is often inaccurate. It could be more helpful to think of grief as something you integrate into your life, learning to move forward alongside it, rather than completely leaving it behind. This means acknowledging that the pain of loss may lessen over time, but the love and memories remain.

Seeking Professional Support

While grief is a natural process, professional support should be considered if grief significantly disrupts daily life or if symptoms persist or worsen over time. Specifically, if you experience intense, prolonged sadness, difficulty with daily tasks, changes in sleep or eating patterns, or thoughts of self-harm, seeking professional help is advised.

Wellbeing support delivers confidential, proactive, and preventative programs. Therapies such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) have been effective in treating traumatic grief. These therapies help individuals process trauma and grief, develop coping strategies, and regain a sense of normalcy.

Know your
people, listen
and lead by
example

**GET
HELP
NOW**

24 Hours **6173 2873**
wellbeing@dpfem.tas.gov.au

You can access a range of confidential services, which are designed specifically for the Tasmanian emergency services community from Wellbeing Support.

Further information is available at mypulse.com.au

Printed fact sheets are available from wellbeing@dpfem.tas.gov.au



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