

Transcript: Grief Kind Class #1 - Is there a normal way to grieve?

What does grief look like?

Grief can look like many different things because it's very individual. People struggle in different ways, and if we're a carer or a family member, we're probably the best placed to notice because we know how those people are normally. And it would really be noticing in your loved one, your family member, how their behaviour might have changed.

So, we might have somebody in the family who's really, really talkative and then they experience a loss, and they might suddenly stop talking. Somebody who never really shares their emotion, on the other hand, might be sharing lots of emotion.

People might experience grief and you know, a loss of appetite, so they might eat less or maybe sometimes they eat more because they feel the need to fill that void that loss has created for them. Some people express a lot of anger, maybe, especially children sometimes show really different kinds of behaviours. Maybe you as an adult become more irritable and less tolerant to listening to other people's stories. There are small signs that just show that you're emotionally full with other stuff, full of grief.

Do men and women grieve differently?

Very understandable that we would think that they do, but actually it's a bit of a stereotype, and it's not so much that men and women grieve differently, but that there are different ways of grieving.

A more feelings-based way of grieving are the people who do want to talk about it and cry very readily or express their anger and their frustration. Action focussed people are people who don't easily talk about or express their emotions but channel that into more physical sort of doing-type activities. It might be that the person they're grieving was a keen gardener and so they take over doing the garden.

The focus tends to be on the person that shows their emotion. We see someone who's obviously showing us signs of sadness and it creates a response in us from a survivor point of view, someone cries and their networks, people around them come to the rescue because you've shown them the signs that you need help.

Whereas the action focussed person seems to be fine and they are often the ones that are overlooked. It's not so much gender bias, but it's the bias that we have in our heads and how we perceive who needs more help.

Do different cultures grieve differently?

Different cultures definitely do grieve in different ways. In some cultures, there's an expectation that you will show that you're grieving for 30, 40 days. In other cultures, there's an expectation that you have a period of mourning for a couple of days and that's it.

You might have somebody in a culture who says, we don't speak of the dead because we want them to be able to move on. There are other cultures that then for example say, well actually we need to kind of keep them close, so it's perfectly okay to talk to them.

Those are two really good examples and almost extremes of how then we can have dialogue with the person that we're looking after, to be able to get some cultural insights with regard to how they deal with it. A lot of the time it's around asking questions of curiosity - "How does your family do that?", "Do you know about certain ways that you might want to try to do that or might want to try it differently because it might work better for you?"

So, we can't make assumptions about how different cultures or families grieve, or those individuals, because we're always going to have the traditional aspects that the people bring, and then the individual aspects within that tradition and not everybody agrees it the same way, even within families.

When might someone need more support?

When people struggle with grief, that's normally a really natural response to loss, and we expect them to suffer because there's an emotional and physical pain that comes with loss, and there is a fine line between feeling loss temporarily or for several months or maybe years.

There is no time frame for grief. We know that. And people grieve in their own way, and they work through things on their own. But when we start moving into things where we notice there's long periods of sleepless nights, long periods of isolation, long periods of neglect, it's when the signs of grief are just going on and on and on, and it's really impacting on them, and that's when we think this this is where people need some help.

Really, what we're looking for is people getting into a perhaps a very dark place where they're maybe feeling quite despairing, quite hopeless. That's when we should really be worried about people and very much encouraging them to go to their GP, or if necessary, even taking them to the doctor ourselves.