

# Are You Grieving or Mourning?

**You're not alone.  
We're here to support.**

There is no timeline for grief. Knowing there are supports and resources available can give hope as you move through your grief.



## Grief

Grief refers to the **internal response**, feelings, and thoughts you experience when someone you love or are connected to dies.

- It is the internal meaning given to the experience of loss.
- You may experience a variety of different feelings: Loneliness, fear, anger, anxiety, pain, sadness, guilt, regret, shock, resentment, etc.
- Most people have this experience when someone they love or are connected to dies.



## Mourning

Mourning refers to the **outward expression** of your grief feelings; grief outside of oneself.

- It is 'grief gone public' (A. Wolfelt); when expressed, your grief burden begins to become lighter.
- Mourning creates momentum towards healing.

We live in a grief avoidant culture; our society tends to be uncomfortable with outward expressions of pain or suffering and this may negatively affect you in different ways.

- You may be encouraged to move away from expressing your grief outwardly.
- You may also feel or begin to feel ashamed to show your grief and may:
  - Withhold your tears.
  - Not talk about your loved one.
  - Try to be busy and distract yourself from your thoughts and feelings.
  - Try to hide your thoughts and feelings to appease and protect others.

## The truth about mourning

- It takes strength and perseverance to mourn.
- Your pain will soften or lessen as you allow yourself to fully mourn.
- When you take part in mourning practices, you move toward reconciling your loss and healing.
- Comfort associated with remembering your loved one will increase over time through the engagement of mourning.

## Things to Ponder

- **Have I been mourning my loved one's death or have I restricted myself to grieving?**
- **Do I see myself as having difficulty with expressing my grief feelings outside of myself (i.e. mourning)? If so, why?**
- **Who or what has been helpful in my mourning?**

**If you allow yourself to mourn, be proud of yourself as you are creating conditions that will help you heal.**





## Linking Objects






Linking objects may take many different forms and provide a level of support and comfort to bereaved individuals. For a person who is grieving, these objects can provide a level of attachment to their loved one who has died.

Linking objects can be a material item that was owned and/or cherished by a loved one who has died, such as clothing items, jewellery, bedding, toys, or letters/cards, etc. They can also be items that link to other senses or memories such as photos, perfume/cologne, a song, a type of food, or a place.

During the initial stage of grief, linking objects may not serve as a comfort. However, this can change as you begin to adjust to life after the death of your loved one. At first, you may keep many objects as you hold them to the same level of importance that your loved one did.

Over time, and as you begin your healing, the meaning connected to certain objects will change. This change in meaning is also known as the **“winnowing process”** (H. Hodgson).

**When you are ready to begin this process, it is important to remember a few things:**

-  Do not feel pressured to begin this process; follow your instincts.
-  You do not need to part with items that continue to have special meaning for you.
-  If items have special meaning but you no longer have physical space to keep them, you can take photos or videos of the items so you can return to them when you feel you need to.
-  If circumstances allow, do not rush this process; take the time that is needed for you. There is no specific time frame when winnowing should occur.
-  Organize/group items:
  1. Items that hold meaning to you and will be kept.
  2. Items that you feel others (connected to you and/or your loved one) would like to have or utilize.
  3. Items that you are comfortable donating or discarding.

This personal process can feel complicated when other grievers connected to your loved one are also involved. It is helpful when grievers discuss their thoughts, feelings, and concerns with others during this time. It is important that each griever's voice is heard, and not overpowered. Remember, a person's grief is like no other, how you may view or feel about an item may differ from someone else.

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## Continuing Bonds

The practice of building *continuing bonds* is a way to maintain a form of attachment and connection, by keeping your loved one present in your life after they have died. When a person dies, their impact on your life does not disappear; continuing bonds as a practice *“acknowledges that grief is an ongoing process and may describe many grief related behaviours”* (E. Haley).

**Ways to build continuing bonds are (L. Williams):**

1. Talk about your loved one to others, especially those who are new in your life.
2. Talk to your loved one.
3. Imagine what advice your loved one would give, when making decisions or in times of stress.
4. Have your loved one be a part of events, holidays, and special celebrations.
5. Take the trip they wanted to take. Take a connection item of theirs with you.
6. Make plans on how you will acknowledge your loved one on the anniversary of their death.

The use of continuing bonds does not mean that you will remain in a state of intense grief forever. Instead it's a way to process your loss and establish a new relationship with your loved one, while you adjust to your changed life.

