

# When grief shows up at work

Practical coping strategies for the workday

## What is grief?

Grief is a natural response to losing someone or something meaningful. It can affect emotions, thoughts, behaviours, and physical wellbeing. Because grief is deeply personal, people express it in many different ways.



## Common grief responses can include:

**Emotional:** sadness, anger, irritability, guilt, numbness

**Cognitive:** difficulty focusing, forgetfulness, reduced productivity

**Physical:** fatigue, headaches, sleep changes, appetite changes

**Behavioral:** withdrawal, restlessness, decreased motivation

Grief isn't linear. People move through emotions like anger, denial, or acceptance in their own way and in no set order.

## How grief can affect work:

Grief can affect employees at work, even when they seem "fine."

You may experience:

- Difficulty concentrating or finishing tasks
- Feeling overwhelmed by routine work
- Lower stress tolerance
- Reduced motivation or changes in work quality
- Emotional triggers (dates, reminders, conversations)
- Needing more breaks or quiet time
- Difficulty with social or collaborative tasks

These reactions are normal, not a sign of weakness or unprofessionalism.

## Communicating your grief at work

There is no obligation to disclose personal details. However, transparent communication - within your comfort zone - can help set expectations and reduce pressure.

### Tips for communicating:

- Share only what feels appropriate: *"I'm going through a difficult loss and may need some flexibility this week."*
- Be clear about immediate needs: workload adjustments, deadlines, quiet time, or schedule changes.
- Ask team leader or your manager about available support.
- If talking feels difficult, consider email or using HR as an intermediary.



## Coping strategies for your work day

Grief doesn't disappear during working hours, but small supportive practices can help:

- **Take short breaks:** Step outside, walk, breathe, or ground yourself.
- **Use tools that help you stay organised:** Lists, timers, simplified workflows.
- **Set boundaries:** Protect your emotional energy by limiting non-essential commitments.
- **Lean on trusted colleagues:** You don't have to do everything alone.
- **Bring grounding items:** A photo, affirmation card, or calming object.
- **Communicate realistically:** Let people know when you're at capacity.

Give yourself permission to have good days and hard days.

## Support from Griefline

If a customer is showing signs of grief, staff may wish to share information about Griefline's free services:

Support from Griefline

-  National helpline: 1300 845 745 (8am–8pm AEST, 365 days a year)
-  Visit [griefline.org.au](http://griefline.org.au) to access information and support resources, including articles, eBook, podcast, stories of lived experiences and translated fact sheets
-  24/7 online peer-to-peer moderated forums to connect and share with others who understand

