

Transcript: Grief Kind Class #4 - How long does grief last?

How can you live with grief?

In this class, we'll explore how long grief lasts. It's really not possible to say how long grief lasts. It's individual, and it's about how people learn to cope, to manage, and to live with their grief. The timescale is going to be predicated to the personal experience of the person that we're talking about, the way they deal with things, how they approach life.

Some people talk about the fried egg when it comes to how grief works. The first thing you do is you crack the egg, and what you see first is the round egg yolk, and it doesn't really change shape from the beginning. That's a bit like grief. So, at first, all you see when you're bereaved is that grief everywhere in your body and the world around you. Then, a bit like what happens in the pan is the bit that was invisible at first starts to show, the egg white. That's kind of how grief works, and life. So, grief stays the same throughout. It is kind of somewhere in your body, and then life happens around it.

So, delayed grief is when the grief response doesn't happen immediately after the bereavement. Sometimes it can take years for people to really start to maybe engage with the trickier bits of their grief. If you want to support your friend and you wonder why they aren't showing what you think is grief, the worst thing to do is probably to try and trigger them. If you want to shake them, if you want to say "no, no, we need to talk about your grief", if they're not ready for it, then, you know, that could be quite damaging for them potentially. It's worth checking with them how they sense their situation to be.

Anticipatory grief is a term that we use when somebody has started the grieving process before the person's actually died. People will say quite often "I started grieving beforehand", and sometimes people project ahead and they try to think about what it's going to be like and how are they going to miss them and how are they going to cope. That's a very valid response. Some people need to do that. If that's what people need to do, they need to think about it. They need to try and prepare themselves. It's certainly not for me to say to them, you mustn't or you shouldn't do that. Again, it's about people's coping style, and us trying to support them with how it is for them.

How can you help someone live with grief?

If you really do want to carry on supporting somebody throughout their grief, knowing that their grief could go on for weeks, for months, for years, for the rest of their life potentially, it's helping them reinvest in life and pick up on life while acknowledging all the feelings, all the emotions. Be that friend to them, laugh about the same stuff. If you're into silly jokes, if you're into going to the pub, just continue to have that rapport with them, it just shows that one thing hasn't changed, and that's that friendship, that relationship between the two of you.

Some people might want to mark anniversaries or have special dates that either remind them of the person. Often people tell me that they find the build up to those days harder than the actual day. It's the "oh, I don't know what I'm going to be like on the day" that makes



them very stressed out, so the friend might pick up on that. Some people prefer to mark birthdays rather than death days. Some people mark other days like when they first met. It's around again finding, you know, what is it that is important to you marking those times. I know someone who would go to the garden centre for the anniversaries and birthdays to have steak and chips because that's what they used to do with their partner, and they would go there and it would feel very strange to be there by themselves. So, the friend said, you know, do you want me to come along, I'll be quiet if you want me to? And so that became their tradition now, so they now go together to have that meal and have a chat and, you know, remind themselves of the person that has died. Supporters have a role in keeping memory alive of the person that has died to help the bereaved to remember, but also to show that they haven't forgotten.