

Grief and bereavement

Ambiguous loss



- What is grief?
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What are grief and bereavement?

Bereavement is..

Bereavement is the period of time when we have lost someone or something important to us

Grief is..

Grief is a response to bereavement. Everyone experiences grief differently, though it is commonly associated with feelings of sadness, despair, anger, or denial

Grief can also affect us physically; for example, we may find a change in our eating habits or sleeping patterns. These reactions are common and normal

Types of grief..

There are many different types of grief

Some of the more commonly recognised forms of grief include **anticipatory grief**, disenfranchised grief or ambiguous grief

But there are other types as well, such as parasocial grief, or special interest grief

What is

ambiguous loss?

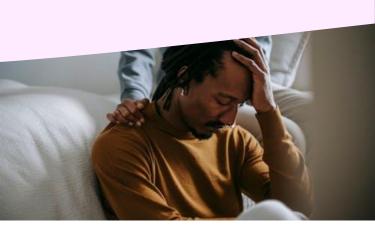
Ambiguous

loss happens when we experience grief without clear closure or certainty. This might include grief for a person who hasn't died, but whose absence or change leaves us grieving.

Ambiguous loss may occur when a loved one has an advanced dementia, and may no longer seem to be the person they once were. It can also be grieving someone who is still alive, but physically or emotionally absent (for example a loved one who is missing or has left without explanation)

This form of grief isn't always recognized or acknowledged, so can feel especially difficult or isolating.

How can it affect us?



Ambiguous loss can affect us in many of the same ways as other forms of grief. We may also feel angry, stressed, or confused, especially where there is uncertainty (for example if a loved one is missing).

People have also reported feelings of disappointment or guilt for grieving a person who is still alive.

Some examples of

ambiguous loss

If a loved one is struggling with an addiction, it can lead to an ambiguous loss. They may still be present, and we may still see them every day. But we may feel that the person they used to be has changed.

When loved ones go missing, it can also lead to an ambiguous loss. Uncertainty about how they are, where they are, or what has happened can lead to us feeling grief.

Grief is our natural response to loss. This means that we may grieve someone or something, even if they haven't died, or we don't know if they have died.

More information

Mind

https://www.mind.org.uk/informa tion-support/guides-tosupport-andservices/bereavement/aboutbereavement/

Marie Curie

https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/information/grief/stages-of-grief

Cruse

https://www.cruse.org.uk/underst anding-grief/

Sue Ryder

https://www.sueryder.org/griefsupport/about-bereavementand-grief/stages-of-grief/

This leaflet was researched and created by Charley Whitehurst, supervised by Teign Angels. Charley has been on a work placement with us from September to December 2025.