

HOW GRIEF AFFECTS THE BRAIN, BODY, AND BEHAVIOR

Compassionate guidance for family, friends, and caregivers

Grief is a whole-person response to loss. As the mind and nervous system adjust to a world without someone important, thinking, sleep, appetite, energy, emotions, and everyday actions may temporarily feel unfamiliar. These reactions can be intense, change from day to day, and differ greatly between people. Understanding what grief can affect helps supporters respond with patience rather than expecting the person to quickly return to normal.

THE BRAIN AND THINKING

Grief can place heavy demands on attention and memory while the mind repeatedly encounters reminders of the loss.

- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Forgetfulness and slowed thinking
- Feeling confused, unreal, or disconnected
- Repeated thoughts, memories, or searching for the person

THE BODY AND NERVOUS SYSTEM

Bereavement is a significant stressor. The body may remain tired, tense, restless, or unusually sensitive to reminders.

- Changes in sleep, appetite, or energy
- Headaches, muscle tension, or digestive discomfort
- Restlessness, fatigue, or feeling easily startled
- A need for more rest and gentler daily expectations

EMOTIONS AND BEHAVIOR

Grief is not only sadness. Feelings and behavior may shift quickly as the person moves in and out of painful moments.

- Tears, numbness, anger, fear, guilt, or relief
- Withdrawing—or needing more closeness
- Changes in routines, motivation, and social energy
- Repeating stories or avoiding certain reminders

HOW SUPPORTERS CAN HELP

Patience and practical care can reduce demands while the grieving person's mind and body adjust to profound change.

- Repeat information and offer one choice at a time
- Support meals, rest, movement, and medical care
- Avoid labeling common reactions as weakness
- Encourage professional help when symptoms persist or disrupt daily life

A GENTLE REMINDER

Grief can affect how a person thinks, feels, moves, sleeps, connects, and functions. Compassionate support makes room for these changes without judgment or pressure.

You do not need perfect words. Your steady, compassionate presence matters.

