



What is helpful?

- Educate yourself about the changes ahead and what to expect.
- Spend quality time together.
- Create memories, share stories and special occasions with family and friends.
- Have those difficult conversations to resolve issues and concerns.
- Access support if available to share your feelings.
- Ask for help when needed.
- Prioritise self-care.
- Access respite care when available.
- Get legal and personal affairs in order whilst still able.
- Have an Advanced Care Directive to confirm medical treatment wishes.

Some Positivity

- The reality of loss is absorbed slowly over time.
- Opportunity is present to finish unfinished business.
- Making restitution is possible for past mistakes.
- Post death wishes can be explored.
- Emotional energy is withdrawn slowly, not abruptly.
- Responsibilities can be negotiated and assumed by others.
- A transfer of roles from the dying person can be achieved.

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Anticipatory Grief

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What is Anticipatory Grief?

Anticipatory grief, also referred to as anticipatory loss or preparatory grief, is the distress a person may feel in the days, months or even years before the death of a loved one or other impending loss. It's the experience of knowing that a change is coming and starting to experience bereavement in the face of that looming change.

This can occur when you or a loved one receives a medical diagnosis or injury that may be life limiting. Or becoming aware that life circumstances will be changing beyond your control, for example retrenchment, forced sale of a home, or moving a parent into a nursing home.

What You Might Feel When Experiencing Anticipatory Grief

There's no set order to what you might feel as you undergo anticipatory grief, and there's no "finishing" one feeling before you move to the next. You may experience many contradictory emotions one day and none the next. You may think you're done feeling certain emotions only for them to return days or weeks later.

People report a range of feelings that may include:

- Anger or irritability or frustration
- Anxiety
- Denial

- Desire to withdraw socially
- Desperation
- Dichotomy of holding on and letting go.
- Dread or fear
- Guilt
- Intense preoccupation with the dying person
- Lethargy or lack of motivation
- Loneliness
- Loss of control over one's emotions
- Resentment
- Regret
- Sadness
- Stress
- Tearfulness
- Uncertainty

Basic versus Anticipatory Grief

Think of conventional grief as "grieving backward," - mourning a loss that has already happened. Anticipatory grief is forward-looking. We're grieving what we still believe we might lose and commences before the death or loss has occurred.

This leaves space for hope, however unrealistic, that the loss may not occur. Anticipatory grievers might find themselves "hanging on to possibilities" in ways that may not be helpful, until the clear endpoint of the actual death or loss.

Stages of Anticipatory Grief

There are four phases a person with anticipatory grief may experience, separately or simultaneously, in any order:

1. Accepting that loss or death is inevitable. This phase often co-occurs with feelings of sadness and depression.
2. Feeling concern for the dying person. For family and friends, this phase may express itself in regret—for example, feeling regret over past arguments or disagreements with the person they are about to lose. For the dying person, this concern may translate to fear of what it's like to die.
3. Rehearsing the loss or death. A person may become focused on funeral arrangements, saying goodbyes and other concerns related directly to what will happen in the time immediately surrounding the impending loss.
4. Imagining the future. Family and friends may envision what life will be like without their loved one. This phase may include visualising holidays and other special occasions without the person or thinking about objects that will be left behind. The person dying may think about similar scenarios, wondering what it will be like for their loved ones to experience life without them. The dying person may also imagine what their own experience may be like after death—what, if anything, comes next.