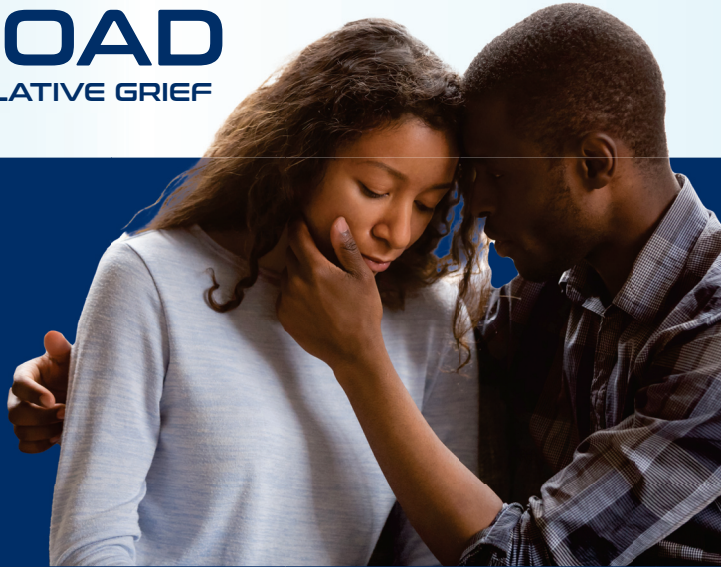


# BEREAVEMENT OVERLOAD

COPING WITH CUMULATIVE GRIEF



Bereavement overload may arise when you experience multiple losses in a short period of time. When you're aware of what bereavement overload is, its symptoms and how you can cope, you can begin to process your grief and move forward.

Experiencing loss is never easy. But when you are faced with multiple losses at once, it can be even more overwhelming and painful. This situation is known as bereavement overload.

## **Bereavement Overload Definition**

The way you feel after experiencing one loss after another without having the time and opportunity to cope. This feeling is also known as cumulative grief or grief overload.

## **Bereavement Overload Risk Factors**

While some may experience bereavement overload from multiple losses at once, others might experience losses that build up over years.

You could be at higher risk of experiencing grief overload if you:

- Lack support from friends and family
  - Find emotional expression difficult
  - Have a history of struggles with mental health
- It's also important to note that bereavement overload isn't only triggered by death. For example, if you lost a relationship, lost your job and a parent was diagnosed with an illness all at once, these compounded difficult circumstances could cause cumulative grief.

## The Effects of Bereavement Overload

- **Numbness** – an inability to feel or express emotions, which can lead to frustration and prolong your grief.
- **Avoidance** – distancing yourself from activities, places or people who remind you of your loss.
- **Guilt** – thinking about what you could have done differently, causing you to keep replaying your loss.
- **Fatigue** – appetite loss, sleep issues or anxiety, which contribute to a cycle of exhaustion.



## How to Cope with Cumulative Grief

Cumulative loss is a tricky problem to deal with. Since it can hit you with many negative side effects while draining your energy, it's important to choose healthy coping mechanisms.

- Talk to Someone you trust can help you express your feelings and realize you aren't alone.
- Reach out to a loved one and schedule a time to get lunch or chat over the phone.
- Writing a daily journal helps you express your grief and articulate the emotions you're feeling.
- Don't censor yourself. Set a 5-minute timer and jot down everything that comes to mind.
- Practicing Mindfulness help you live in the present moment, accept your loss and cope with your feelings. Set aside 5-10 minutes per day to sit and follow your breath in a peaceful environment.
- Creating a Daily Routine helps you prioritise self-care and recover from stress. Write out a daily to-do list for the following day before you go to sleep.
- Practicing Gratitude can help you reduce depressive symptoms and enhance your state of well-being. At the start of each day, write down three things you are grateful for.



## Compartmentalising Grief

When you compartmentalise grief, you're suppressing thoughts and emotions related to your loss. In the short term, compartmentalisation can be necessary to continue to function, but too much of it can prolong the time it takes you to mourn.

### Signs that you're compartmentalising your grief too much include:

- Excessive TV watching, sleeping or substance use
- Avoiding anything that reminds you of your lost loved one
- Isolating yourself from friends and family

**In contrast, there are healthier ways to compartmentalise your grief. Some healthy ways to cope with grief include:**

- **Schedule time to grieve**  
Schedule time to go for a walk or journal where you can sit with your emotions and express yourself.
- **Meet with a therapist**  
If you have a time scheduled out each week to meet with a therapist, you can grieve in a safe environment and hold yourself accountable.
- **Slowly confront your loss**  
Take your time reintroducing yourself to anything you've been avoiding that reminds you of your loss.



Sometimes it's helpful to put your emotions aside temporarily so you can maintain a semblance of normalcy. But it's important to be mindful that you aren't compartmentalising grief all the time. Scheduling time to grieve can allow you to process cumulative grief at your own pace.

Remember that it's important to take care of yourself both mentally and physically.



**If you feel you need help with coping with cumulative grief, you can book an appointment at Mental Health Services (014 590 1700 or 080 000 6942). EAP Counsellors (010 133 0525) are also available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week to offer counselling and support.**