

# Mindful grief

The fight or flight reaction has served humanity well during our evolution. It is possible that without it, we would not be here today.

Once, fight or flight made perfect sense because it could save us from becoming a predator's meal.

Times have changed; we have changed. Now there are more subtle situations in which this instinct does not always serve us well.

Take grief for example. When we are experiencing grief, it is tempting for us to try to fight or run away from it. Another thing we may do is try to distract ourselves from this feeling.

This could be by losing ourselves in our work, using substances such as drugs and alcohol to help numb ourselves to the pain, or any number of other methods.

Losing a person, a thing or an opportunity that you valued is an unpleasant experience. However, it is important that we make time to let ourselves feel the emotions and sensations associated with that loss.

Grief is a natural, healthy response to events that happen in our lives. The stronger our bond with whatever or whoever we have lost, the stronger our feeling of loss will be.

Sometimes it may feel as if there is a void in your life left by the loss of a beloved person or possession. It is important to realise that it is normal to feel this way, and not be in too much of a rush to fill this emptiness.

Grieving gives us an opportunity to say goodbye to what we have lost, and allows our minds to adjust to the reality of life without it. There is no



“normal” way in which to grieve; your reaction to loss is as individual as your fingerprint.

Grief may come in waves, and it is difficult to predict what stimuli will trigger this response in us. Perhaps it's a favourite piece of music, or a day such as a birthday or anniversary that reminds us of our loss. The feeling could just come on its own.

Trying to suppress or postpone this response does not mean that it will go away - we may in fact prolong the process by trying to stifle it. This is not to say that we should seek to wallow in the feeling; we just need to be able to face it on its own terms.

Mindfulness is a tool that can help us increase our physical and mental awareness of what we are experiencing at any given moment, and can be a powerful ally when dealing with grief.

Rather than retreating from the feelings and sensations it can elicit

in us, there is healing value in paying full attention to everything we experience. Mindfulness teaches us that there is no “good” or “bad” experience - these are simply values that we place on what we see and feel.

Fresh insight can be gained when we put aside everything we may believe we have learned about something in the past, and try to imagine we are encountering it for the first time.

The next time you perceive that sinking sensation in the core of your body, or the feeling of a tear sliding down your cheek when you think of what you have lost - pay attention to it. Focus on what it feels like to breathe, or to cry, and try to live inside the moment as if it was a new experience to you.

Rather than being swept up in a confusion of different thoughts and sensations, try to find one thing that is constant to devote your concentration to. Hold onto it, acknowledge it, and let it go when you are ready.

Mindfulness isn't about avoiding difficult and unpleasant feelings, but about finding a sense of “grounding” and acceptance. When we are able to break down a situation into its elements and see it for what it is rather than what it appears to be as a whole, it becomes easier to accept.

Grief seems like a complex phenomenon, but it is often made up of many feelings and responses we may understand and come to terms with if we can analyse them on their own merits.

Accepting our grief mindfully can take us on a greater inner journey than running away from it ever could.

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Taranaki Kowhaiwhai panel - The Hammerhead shark, Mangopare - 'keep positive, see it through'