

# Crew Health Advice: Grief: Our Journey to Healing

Loss is an inevitable, fundamental truth of life that bonds people together. Grief is the emotional suffering we experience when we lose someone or something valuable to us. The death of a loved one is one of the most painful experiences in life that can leave us feeling devastated, sad and heartbroken. But death is not the only loss we encounter in life; divorce, relationship break ups, illness or the loss of health, the death of a pet, a miscarriage, the loss of a job, the loss of financial security, the letting go of our dreams and hopes and all things that we value in life, may evoke powerful feelings of grief.

The loss of normalcy, the loss of social connections and loss of safety that we are

currently experiencing because of the pandemic, has taken an emotional toll on all of us, and in many ways, we are all grieving and in need of healing. For seafarers, this can be even more challenging as they are away from home, away from their loved ones and with limited resources to deal with their grief.

Often, the words bereavement, grief and mourning are used interchangeably when addressing loss. **Bereavement** is the period after a loss during which grief is experienced and mourning occurs, while **grief** is a natural response to loss; it is what we think and feel on the inside that involves strong emotional reactions like shock, sadness, confusion, anguish, emptiness, pain. **Mourning** is best

defined as the external expression of our grief that involves rituals and cultural practices like funerals, wearing black, wakes etc. Both processes help the person move forward integrating their loss into their lives and adjusting to life after the loss.

Grief is a natural response to loss that may vary in intensity and duration depending on the nature and the significance of the loss to the person. Common emotional reactions include:

- Numbness, shock, disbelief, or denial
- Sadness and emotional pain
- Yearning, searching and preoccupation with the deceased or the



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circumstances of the death, having dreams of the deceased, searching for places or things once shared with the deceased

- Despair, anger, guilt and fear
- Physical reactions that include loss of sleep, loss of appetite, physical exhaustion, crying

In 1969 Kubler-Ross, a Swiss American psychiatrist working with terminally ill patients, presented the five stages of grief as a general framework for understanding the responses people have when they grieve. Some people may never go through all the stages, others may get stuck in one stage or go through the stages several times. Grieving is a personal process that allows people to integrate their loss, find meaning and begin their healing journey.

## Stages of Grief

**Stage 1: Denial.** "This is not happening to me."

**Stage 2: Anger.** "Why is this happening to me? Who is to blame?"

**Stage 3: Bargaining:** "I will do anything to change this".

**Stage 4: Depression.** "What is the point of living after the loss?"

**Stage 5: Acceptance.** "It is going to be okay". Healing begins.

**Stage 6: "Finding meaning,"** is integrating the loss and moving through life by finding "your own meaning to the loss". The sixth stage recently added by David Kessler, an expert on grief.

**Anticipatory Grief** is a type of grief that occurs in anticipation of an impending loss or when feeling uncertain about what the future holds, by imagining the worst-case scenarios and feeling overwhelming anxiety. This kind of grief may be more common today because the loss of safety triggered by the pandemic.

**Complicated grief** is prolonged grief. In normal grief the symptoms of grief diminish over time, however people with complicated grief continue to suffer with painful emotions that are so long lasting and severe that they are unable to resume their lives months and even years after the loss.

## Signs and symptoms of complicated grief include:

- Intense sorrow, pain, and rumination of the loss
- Preoccupation with the deceased and the circumstances of the death
- Persistent longing or yearning for the deceased
- Difficulty associating positive memories of the deceased
- Detachment and isolation from family and friends
- Reduced sense of identity
- Feeling that life is meaningless – Lack of desire to pursue personal interests

**Grief and Depression:** Grief is a natural response to loss, which involves physical, mental, and emotional symptoms that are like depression, however there are differences between these two states that are important to understand.

In grief, the focus is on the loss, painful feelings come in waves that decrease in intensity and frequency over time. The predominant feeling is that of emptiness and often intermixed with positive memories of the deceased. Feelings of guilt relevant to the relationship with the deceased may be evident, but social support is comforting, and self-esteem is preserved.

In depression, a specific loss may not be readily identified, mood is constantly negative, and the person is unable to expect pleasure or happiness, feeling of worthlessness and self-loathing are common.

**Coping with grief:** Each of us have our own individual ways of coping with loss; the list below is intended to help you work through your grief and your healing journey.

- Be kind to yourself
- Remind yourself that grief is a natural response to loss
- Don't judge your loss – any loss can trigger grief
- Grief can trigger a wide variety of emotions

- Grief is a personal process – we grieve in our own unique ways
- Don't feel guilty if you cannot cry
- Grief is a gradual process – there is no specific time frame attached to grieving
- Grief is not a linear process – often experienced in waves or cycles
- There is not "one right way to grieve" and no 'quick fixes'
- Accept your pain, it is ok to cry, to hurt, to be angry etc.
- Do not judge or avoid your emotions
- People may experience a wide range of emotions during the process of grieving
- Connect with family and friends who can support you
- Find comfort in your faith
- Take care of your physical needs by eating healthy, sleeping properly, and resting sufficiently
- Be patient – there is no specific time frame to grieving
- Accepting your loss does not mean forgetting, it means integrating the loss and moving on in life

## Supporting others in grief

- Ask them about their feelings
- Be a good listener
- Do not minimise their grief
- Do not offer false comfort by telling them it was for the best
- Be understanding
- Share your feelings
- Acknowledge their pain
- Make yourself available to talk
- Offer practical help – help them with practical tasks

No matter how major or subtle the loss we experience may be, grief touches all of us in unique ways. Grief is a natural reaction to loss that allows us to move forward in our healing journey. Although, there is no specific time frame to healing,

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or specific ways of grieving; if you find yourself suffering or feel that the pain is too much to carry, seek professional assistance to help you move forward in your healing journey.

## Resources

<https://www.mhanational.org/bereavement-and-grief>

<https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/grief>

<https://www.psychologytools.com/self-help/grief-loss-and-bereavement/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK66052/>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm>

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>

## Support

### Mission to Seafarers

Contact a Chaplain. A chat facility is available online manned by a team of chaplains around the world.  
<https://www.missiontoseafarers.org/contact-a-chaplain>

Crew can also email [crewhelp@mtsmail.org](mailto:crewhelp@mtsmail.org) or visit one of the many seafarer centres Worldwide  
<https://www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports>

### Sailors Society

Crisis Response Network providing rapid response trauma care and counselling.  
[crisis@sailors-society.org](mailto:crisis@sailors-society.org)

Emergency helpline:  
▪ +1 938 222 8181  
Helpline instant chat:  
[www.wellnessatsea.org/helpline](http://www.wellnessatsea.org/helpline)

### ISWAN

SeafarerHelp. A free, 24 hour, multilingual helpline for seafarers and their families  
[www.seafarerhelp.org](http://www.seafarerhelp.org)

Help, advice and support available across many platforms including Skype, WhatsApp, Facebook and Viber.

▪ +44 20 7323 2737  
[help@seafarerhelp.org](mailto:help@seafarerhelp.org)

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This advice was compiled with the help of our psychological and psychometric screening partners I.M.E.Q. You can watch their mental health video library at:  
[www.imeq-magazine.com](http://www.imeq-magazine.com)

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The Club was the first to launch a crew health scheme in 1996 due to increasing crew illness claims and a lack of accountability of clinics. Since 1996, the Crew Health programme has become one of the Club's leading loss prevention initiatives. The aim of the programme is to reduce the volume and value of crew illness claims which are caused by a pre-existing illnesses or disease. These underlying conditions often impact on the crew member's fitness for service and can endanger not only the health of the seafarer but also the onboard safety of other crew.

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Sophia joined Thomas Miller in 1992 and from 1994 worked as a claims handler dealing mainly with French and Spanish Members. In 2004, Sophia became the Crew Health Programme Director. Sophia has undertaken a large number of clinic audits, implemented the standard medical

form and clinic guidelines. She has also lead the scheme through the largest period of growth and development with a doubling of approved clinic facilities and a four fold member increase. Sophia is a Director of Thomas Miller & Co. Ltd.

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Saidul Alom joined Crew Health from the European Region Service Team in 2004. Saidul provides administrative support to the Crew Health programme and is responsible for liaison with the approved clinics on financial billing matters and ensuring prompt payment of all clinic fees.

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Stuart joined Thomas Miller in 1998 as a claims trainee for UK P&I Club's Greek Members. In April 2005 Stuart joined Crew Health as the Team Administrator. Stuart is responsible for co-ordination of Member entries and administration for the clinic approval process.