

Grief and Loss

Grief

- Grief is our response to loss. It is the normal, natural response to loss, and it can affect every part of our life, including our thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, feelings, physical health and our relationships with others.

Grief is an individual experience

- Whatever you feel, it's important to remember that everyone reacts to death differently, so don't get caught up with worrying about whether you're managing grief the 'right' way. Allow yourself to feel how you feel, and grieve properly so that you can eventually start to feel better.
- Grief is individual and personal, and it's important to respect each other's way of grieving



Grief comes and goes like
waves in the ocean. There will
be stormy times,
There will be calm
times.....
Grief comes and goes.

Grief doesn't have a timeline

- Grief can be triggered at any time, and it's not unusual for grief to be felt over an extended period of time. It's okay to admit you are struggling with your grief, whether it be weeks, months, years or even decades after the death.

Common grief responses

- **Physically:** Headaches, feeling tired, achy muscles and nausea.
- **Emotionally:** Sadness, anger, disbelief, despair, guilt and loneliness.
- **Mentally:** Forgetfulness, lack of concentration, confusion and poor memory.
- **Behaviourally:** Changes to sleeping patterns, dreams or nightmares, or to your appetite. You might or might not want to go out or be around people. You may also experience unusual emotional reactions or feel weepy.
- **Socially:** Some friends may avoid you because they don't know what to say or how to help you. You might also feel pressure to be strong for family or friends, or you may not feel like seeing anyone.
- **Spiritually:** Your beliefs may be challenged and you may struggle to have faith in the things that you once believed in.

Common grief responses in adolescents

- Shock and disbelief that the person has died
- Sadness that the person has gone
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things
- Reluctance to go to school
- Disruptive behaviours/frequent fighting
- Non-compliance to requests
- Hyperactivity
- Increased need for attention
- Issues of abandonment, insecurity and safety concerns
- Fear, guilt, relief, anger, rage, regret, confusion
- Concern about being treated differently
- Change in values, questioning what's important
- Preoccupation with death, wanting details
- Changes in relationships and family roles
- Wanting to be physically close to safe adults
- Changes to sleep patterns and appetite
- Headaches, tiredness, muscle aches and nausea
- Anxiety about the future

Things that can help in managing grief

Accepting your feelings

- It's okay to feel sad about losing someone special and to take time to cope with what has happened.
- Losing someone is stressful and upsetting, and it's normal to experience strong emotions.
- Allow yourself to express your thoughts and feelings privately. Write a letter or a poem, draw, collect photos, cry etc.
- Keep a diary or journal.

Allowing yourself time to grieve

- Allowing yourself time to grieve and if you can, let yourself cry.
- You might need a safe place at home or at school to go when you're especially sad.

Taking time out

- Being around other people can sometimes be stressful and overwhelming, especially if they are also grieving.
- Go for a walk
- Listen to some music
- Sit in a park
- Do something enjoyable like shopping or going to a movie.
- Setting some time aside each day or week just to let yourself grieve.

Look after yourself

- It is really important to look after yourself.
- It is important to try and keep regular routines of sleep, eating and exercise.
- These things can feel hard to keep up but they can improve how you think, and how you feel.

Getting a good night's sleep

- making your bedroom an environment that's a haven removed from the stresses of the day and as dark as possible
- keeping regular times for going to bed and getting up
- getting some sunlight during the day
- trying a calming bedtime routine. Have a warm bath, drink warm milk or herbal teas
- using lavender oil to promote a sense of calm
- taking away all electronic gadgets like phones, TVs and computers at least 1 hour before bedtime
- meditating last thing at night or writing in a journal

Exercise

- boost your energy
- build self-confidence and feelings of accomplishment
- help you be more sociable (and working out in groups is often better than doing it alone)
- help you get better sleep
- help reduce stress
- distract you from your worries and negative thought patterns
- boost memory
- get you outside

Other things that may help

- Do or make something to honour your loved one.
- Develop your own rituals, e.g. light a candle, listen to special music, make a special place to think.
- Explore other people's experiences through books, movies, articles, etc.
- Do things that are relaxing and soothing.
- Mindfulness activities

Mindfulness

Mindfulness can help improve:

- our concentration
- our relationships
- how we deal with our problems
- our clarity – without all the negative thoughts cluttering our head, assisting decision making
- increase positivity and how happy we feel about life
- help us manage stress
- increase brain function – improving memory and creativity
- improve how well we get along with others.

Try mindfulness meditation

Just breathe

- We can use our breath as an ‘anchor’ for our emotions.
- Try this for a few minutes each day:
- Find a quiet space
- Spend a few minutes noticing your breathing
- Feel your breath entering and leaving your nostrils
- Feel the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe.

There are thousands of guided examples online and apps built just for this.

My favourite is smiling minds.



Things you can do with people

- Allow people to help you; don't be embarrassed to accept their help.
- Consider joining a support group to share with others who have had similar experiences.
- Take opportunities to join in public ceremonies where you can be private, yet part of a larger group.
- Talk to someone you trust about how you are feeling – maybe a friend, teacher or parent.
- Talk with a counsellor to find support and comfort, and to find other ways to manage

Share memories and stories

- Sharing with other people can reduce the sense of isolation and loneliness that comes with grief.
- Talk to family and friends; sharing memories and stories, thoughts and feelings can be comforting and strengthen your connection with your loved one.

General Points on how to help others

Some things to know about grieving people

- There is no doubt that having the love and support of family and friends is one of the most important ways that grieving people manage personal crisis and tragedies. There are many ways you can be supportive and helpful to people you know who are grieving. Your care and support is very important, probably more important than you realise. No-one can take away the pain and sadness, but knowing that people care is comforting and healing.
- Grief can make people very sensitive and they may react or respond in unexpected ways.
- Grief can be likened to having an open wound, and it can be easy for others to inadvertently ‘touch a nerve’ or say or do the wrong thing. There is no formula for what is right or wrong. What one person finds helpful, another person may not.
- The most important thing is to make sure your friend or relative knows that you care. Find a way to show them this, perhaps by visiting, calling or texting them, giving food, bringing flowers, or sending cards and letters.

How you can help someone who is grieving

- offering to come over and just be there for them
- listening and accepting strong emotions
- showing that you care; a hug might be helpful
- offering practical support, e.g. cooking
- sharing your memories and stories of their loved one with them
- acknowledging birthdays, anniversaries, milestones and other significant occasions
- asking how they are, both initially and on an ongoing basis
- not saying ‘I know’ or ‘I understand’ unless you really do
- avoiding platitudes – ‘It’s God’s will’, ‘They had a good innings’, etc.
- not avoiding them – while there are no words that can heal their pain, the absence of family and friends can make the pain much worse

Be patient

- People who are grieving will not necessarily know themselves what will be the most helpful. This may be a new experience for them too. Try to offer support in different ways and at different times. If you are unsure, ask.
- Don't take their responses personally – grief is an emotional rollercoaster and the reactions of the bereaved are not a personal attack on you

Helping adolescents navigate their grief experience

Listen and talk with them

- Adolescents need and want truth as much as adults. When they don't get it they may lose trust with that adult and attempt to piece together information with peers, which can often be incorrect or embellished, resulting in worry and confusion.
- Try to be open, honest and consistent in your communications with them. Invite them to talk about the loss and respect their choice if they are not ready, but check in with them regularly in case they change their mind.
- Be prepared to listen if the person who is grieving wants to talk – even over and over about the same things.

Provide safety and security

- Adolescents often look to their peers for support when times are tough, so encourage and support them to connect with friends in a safe environment.
- Encourage their continued participation in enjoyable activities, such as sports or hobbies, and try to maintain routines as much as possible.
- Adolescents need affection, security, trust from their families
- Relationships are central.

Life grows around grief

- It is a common myth that people ‘get over’ grief. The reality is, a part of us will always grieve the loss of our loved one. With time, the pain will lessen, but the sorrow we feel will always be a part of us. When people grieve they are coming to terms with what has changed in their lives. There is no ‘return to normal’; rather, we have to learn to live around a new kind of normal – re-learning the world and re-learning ourselves within it.

Extra Support

When to seek further help

- While the majority of children are resilient and 85–90% of people find that with the support of their family and friends and their own resources, they gradually find ways to learn to live with their loss and do not need to seek professional help.
- Research has shown that some children may need further help. If you are finding it difficult to manage on a day-to-day basis, it may be helpful to see a counsellor or other health professional.
- It's okay to admit you are struggling with your grief. No-one will think any less of you if you ask for help along the way.

Causes for concern

Be aware of signs that indicate an adolescent is not coping and seek professional support where the following is evident:

- hopelessness, depression, intense sadness
- dramatic changes in personality
- antisocial or violent behaviours
- excessive guilt or self-blame related to the death
- risk taking or behaving dangerously
- inappropriate sexual behaviour
- breaking the law or illegal behaviour
- excessive gaming
- drug and alcohol abuse
- prolonged sleep and/or eating problems
- extended withdrawal or isolation from family and/or friends
- reoccurring thoughts of death
- ongoing suicidal thoughts or evidence of self-harming behaviours.

Where to get further help:

- **Lifeline** 13 11 14
- **Kids Help Line** 1800 551 800
- **Salvo Careline** 1300 363 622
- **Beyondblue** 1300 224 636
- **Headspace (12 to 25 yrs)**

www.headspace.org.au

- Your Doctor (mental health plan)
- School counsellor
- Your teacher
- **National Association for Loss and Grief** (NALAG) provides general information on bereavement support services.

www.nalag.org.au

- **Bereavement Care Centre** - 14 Hollis Ave Eastwood NSW 2122

Tel: 1300 654 556

www.bereavementcare.com.au

- **Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement**

Provides grief and bereavement education and resources.

www.grief.org.au

This is not a comprehensive list of bereavement counsellors. Further information may be obtained by contacting your local Community Health Centre or GP.