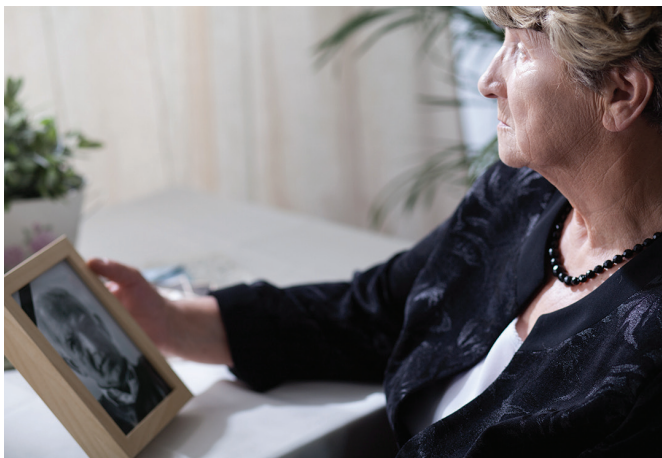


Coping with *grief* in adult life





Understanding Adult Grief

The death of a loved one whether anticipated or not, is one of the most stressful experiences that we will encounter during our life. Grief is our response to this loss. It is the thoughts, feelings and reactions we experience when someone we love dies. Grief is painful and it affects every part of us, our mind, body and spirit. It is also varied and different for different people.

Our grief is impacted by our relationship to the person who has died and how they gave meaning to our life. While these experiences may be unfamiliar to you, grief is a normal, natural and healthy response to the loss of someone you loved and valued.

The purpose of this brochure is to answer some of the questions you might have about grief and to offer some insights into what you might be experiencing at this time. Suggestions have also been included which may provide some added guidance and support during this period in your life.

How long will my grief last?

It is important to understand that grief is something we experience as opposed to something we must overcome. Every individual reacts to grief and loss differently and in the same way, the length of the healing process is unique to each of us. The grieving process does not fit into a precise timetable or follow a set pattern however over time the pain and distress may decrease.

With support from family, friends and (if necessary) professional counsellors, we can gradually learn to adjust, recover from our loss and find new ways to live. Grief is by nature unpredictable and may resurface at any stage of your life triggered by an experience that sparks a memory of the person who has died. This too is normal and natural. With time, support and healing, most people find that they become more in control of their grief rather than their grief being in control of them.

What can happen during the grieving process?

The changes that are associated with the death of someone we love can leave us confused, fearful and uncertain. Our initial response to such a loss is often shock, numbness, denial and disbelief.

This is nature's way of temporarily protecting us from the full reality of what we have lost. Feeling childlike, helpless and vulnerable on the inside is another common response to the crisis that accompanies loss.

Although your experience of grief is unique, there are some responses to loss that we all share. Some of these you may experience, while others you will not.

Emotional responses you may experience:

- Sadness, pain
- Feelings of helplessness, panic, despair
- Depression
- Anxiety, fear
- Anger, frustration, resentment
- Loneliness, yearning
- Self-blame, guilt
- Relief, hope, acceptance
- Fatigue

Physical responses you may experience:

- Loss of appetite, lack of energy
- Headaches, dizziness, nausea
- Tightness in the chest, heart palpitations, breathlessness
- Muscle aches and pains
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Weight gain or loss

Thoughts you might have:

- You may think you will never get over your loss
- You may experience disbelief
- You may have a preoccupation with images of the deceased
- Loss of memory, confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Obsessive or compulsive thoughts
- Visual or auditory hallucinations

Behaviours you might notice:

- Crying
- Difficulty sleeping
- Change in appetite
- Social withdrawal
- Disorganisation or restlessness
- Searching for the deceased
- Treasuring objects belonging to the deceased
- Avoiding reminders of the deceased
- Dreams or nightmares

What can I do to help and support myself?

As the experience of grief is unique to each individual, the strategies that may help during this time will also differ. Thinking back to any past periods of stress and emotional upheaval in your life and the things that helped you at those times can give you an idea of the strategies that work best for you.

The following is a list of suggestions that others have found useful

- Allow yourself to cry
- Look after yourself – get plenty of rest and try to eat small, easily digestible meals
- Limit alcohol, tranquillisers, analgesics, sleeping tablets and other mood altering drugs
- Participate in regular gentle exercise
- Ask for help and support from others who care about you
- Share stories, thoughts and feelings about your loved one with family and friends
- Express your grief outwardly. Using a diary or journal to write, draw, paint or scrapbook also helps to express your feelings and tell the story of your loss

- Create a memorial to honour your loved one
- Use rituals and customs that are meaningful to you – for example visit your loved ones resting place, continue to celebrate special days such as anniversaries and birthdays
- Draw on religious and spiritual beliefs if this is helpful to you
- Take time out to do the things you would normally enjoy and things that are relaxing and soothing

What do I do if I feel I am not coping?

Don't expect too much from yourself too soon. However, if you or anyone close to you is concerned about any of the responses that you are experiencing, it is a good idea to seek medical advice from your GP. Grief shares many of the same symptoms as depression. Talk to your GP if you are unsure whether you are experiencing normal grief or depression.

Usually painful feelings diminish with time however professional help may be required if your feelings remain at an intense level for a prolonged period. Talking to a trained counsellor can provide support and comfort and help you to find other ways to manage, especially if you are having trouble resolving the thoughts, feelings or behaviours connected with your loss.

Most of us learn to live with our loss with the support of family, friends and our own resources. If your life or your grief seems particularly complicated and difficult, it is a good idea to seek professional help.



Grief support services:



beyondblue.org.au
1300 224 636



feelthemagic.org.au
1300 602 465



rednose.org.au
1300 308 307



lifeline.org.au
13 11 14



blackdoginstitute.org.au



cancer.org.au
13 11 20



kidshelpline.com.au
1800 551 800



thecompassionatefriendsnsw.org.au
1300 064 068



Central Coast 24hr Careline **02 4324 1533**

Offices at: Palmdale, Mingara, Toukley, Erina Heights

Hunter Region 24hr Careline **02 4991 5556**

Offices at: Kurri Kurri, Cessnock, East Maitland

Sydney 24hr Careline **02 9488 9265**

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