

DEALING WITH LOSS AND GRIEF



We all experience losing a loved one some time in our lives. No matter how old you are, this is upsetting and painful and leaves you with a range of feelings from shock and disbelief to sadness, anger and loneliness. It takes time to get over these feelings and to adjust to life without the person, but it is possible.

GRIEVING TAKES TIME

Feelings of grief are different for each person and take time to pass. The feelings may be so intense that you feel like you're out of control and can't stop crying. On the other hand you may feel empty and numb. You might find it difficult to eat and have trouble sleeping at night. Grief can cause physical changes as well, such as headaches, stomach aches or getting colds easily. There is no 'right' way to react because everybody deals with loss differently.

As time passes, the feelings of grief won't be there all the time and they'll be less intense. But reminders of your loved one and situations that would have involved both of you may make you feel the loss more strongly.

Special occasions like Easter, Christmas, or birthdays, or looking at photos from when the person was around, can be really painful. Many people find loss hard to accept. It takes some people longer than others to adjust.

The feelings that come with grief, such as difficulty controlling emotions and moods, and feeling teary and tired, can be similar to depression. Grief can also be a trigger for depression. Emotions can be so intense that sometimes it is difficult to know whether you're feeling down because of the grief or whether you have symptoms of depression. A simple difference between the two is that feelings of grief come and go and change in intensity, while depression affects you nearly all the time.

WORKING THROUGH GRIEF

It can feel like there's nothing you can do to work through your grief. But there are some practical things to help you on the journey towards a new life.

Keeping a diary of your feelings and memories can give some relief and also show you how your feelings of grief have changed over time. It can also help to write a letter to the person to say goodbye – include what you did together and what you really valued in your relationship. If you don't feel like writing, you could keep a book in which you draw pictures or other visual reminders of your time together.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MANAGING LOSS AND GRIEF

It can be helpful to:

- Allow yourself to cry – letting your feelings out can bring some relief.
- Take time out – if you need to be alone sometimes that's okay.
- Let yourself smile – it's okay to enjoy your memories.
- Say goodbye – letting go is part of the grieving process.
- Avoid bottling things up – keeping feelings to yourself may build tension inside you.
- Be gentle with yourself – give yourself time to recover.
- Talk to someone – sharing your feelings with someone you trust can help.
- Stay healthy – eat well and stay physically active.

It's not helpful to:

- use alcohol or drugs to dull your pain
- act out your frustration with risky behaviour (e.g. reckless driving)
- take out your anger on others
- experiment casually with sex to get close to someone
- hide your feelings to protect someone else.

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Info line: 1300 22 4636

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Some people find it helps to have a 'grief period' every day, when they spend time alone thinking, crying, praying, meditating, writing or drawing. On the other hand, it's a good idea to take some time out from grieving, for example by listening to music or going to the movies, playing sport or reading.

The process of grieving can seem long and lonely, so it can help to find someone you can talk to about your feelings – a friend or relative, or you may prefer to talk to a teacher, counsellor or doctor.

WHEN IS IT OVER?

It's impossible to predict how long it will take someone to overcome grief. Feelings come and go, and it can feel like you're always taking one step forward and two steps back. For most people time is the best healer, and it may take weeks or months before you can start to accept the changes in your life.

Feeling better is a sign that you're working through your grief and adjusting to life without your loved one – it doesn't mean that you're forgetting them or letting them down.

If you continue to feel down, it may be that other things are affecting your mood. If you feel sad or miserable most of the time and have lost interest in things you used to enjoy, you may be experiencing depression and need to get some help.



KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

Losing a loved one is a stressful experience. Most people pass through the period of grief but some continue to feel unhappy for a long time. Sometimes people develop a Major Depressive Episode after losing a loved one. You may be experiencing Major Depression if for **MORE THAN TWO WEEKS** you:

- have felt sad, down or miserable or irritable most of the time
- have lost interest or enjoyment in nearly all of your usual activities.

You might also be:

- not doing so well at school, university or work and/or
- experiencing changes in your relationships with family and friends.

If this applies and you also have **FOUR OR MORE** of the following symptoms, you may have depression:

- lost or gained lots of weight
- restless, agitated or slowed down
- lost a lot of energy and feel tired all the time
- find it difficult to concentrate or make up your mind
- feel worthless or guilty
- feel that life is not worth living.

If this is happening to you, talk to your doctor.

These feelings are unlikely to go away on their own.



MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

You can speak to trained counsellors by phoning these 24-hour telephone counselling services:

Lifeline 13 11 14 (cost of a local call)

Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800 (freecall)

Information and support is also available from the following websites:

beyondblue www.youthbeyondblue.com or www.beyondblue.org.au

Information on depression, anxiety and how to help a friend

headspace www.headspace.org.au
Information, support and help near you

ReachOut.com www.reachout.com
Information and support for young people going through tough times

The websites below can help you to find health services in your area. They list services that are either free of charge or low cost:

Kids Help Line www.kidshelp.com.au

Lifeline Service Finder
www.lifeline.org.au/service_finder

If you or a friend want to communicate with someone via email or online, Kids Help Line offers confidential, non-judgemental, emotional support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

SOURCES This fact sheet is based on the following sources:

- **beyondblue** www.youthbeyondblue.com ■ **ReachOut.com** www.reachout.com
- Great Ormond Street Hospital, London www.childrenfirst.nhs.uk
- The Australian Child & Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network www.earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au
- NALAG centre for grief and loss www.nalag.org.au

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