

## Grief and Loss

It is often quite a shock when someone you know dies, even when it is an expected death after a long illness.

Those who are grieving will react differently to the loss. For some it can take a long time to recover. Everyone reacts differently when someone dies and there is no right or wrong way to grieve.



**Grief and sadness:** You may remain in shock in the weeks following the death of a loved one. For some, it may lead, at least for a time, to overwhelming grief and sadness. Coping with grief and loss often requires effort. It can be both emotional and physical.

How you respond may depend on:

- The relationship you had with the person that died
- How you shared the last months and days with the person who died
- How and under what circumstances the person died.

Support from your family and friends is important when someone has died.

Tiredness and grief can make it difficult for you to remember some things. Sometimes talking about the final days can help you to work through your experience of grief.

After someone has died, some people may avoid talking about them for fear of causing

you distress. Sometimes it is better to take the lead. Talking about a loved one will let your family and friends know that it is okay.

### Children and grief and loss

Children grieve in a different way from adults. Grief will affect each child or teenager differently.

Their behaviour may change; they may need support or someone to talk to. Each of them will take in information in different ways. This will depend on the child or teenager. It will depend on their age, and their emotional maturity and how the illness and death is explained to them. It will also depend on who has died, how they died, and the child's relationship with them.

It is important to be available and talk at the level they are able. If this is difficult for you, talk with your GP, community palliative care service or school about supports for your child.

Older children are quite often carers to a close family member. There are specific supports available for young carers.

### Loss of a child

The loss of a child is devastating. Nothing can prepare you or other family members for when it actually happens. Parental grief has been described as being more intense than other grief. This is regardless of the age of the child.

You may have been providing care for months or even years. Often you would have cared for your child at home. This can be exhausting and emotionally draining.

Some parents have also described it as a positive experience.

When your child has died, this caring role ends. It is a period of great change and conflicting emotions. Health care teams will no longer be as involved.

Bereavement services and other supports may be available to you. Talk to your palliative care team about this.

If you have other children they can be deeply affected by loss and grief. Depending on their age, they may display a wide range of emotions and behaviours. They may have difficulty with their own grief. This can be especially true in light of the immense grief of the adults around them. Other members of the family, and friends, may feel a great loss. Many will want to help you but won't know how.

### Remembering

Following a death, you may spend time to reflect and acknowledge the person's life. In this way the person who has died will still have a voice, a story, or a connection that remains with you.

You may feel sad and at a loss but still want to recall and remember good memories. There are many ways you could do this, such as a remembrance service or celebration of life (many hospice or palliative care services and some hospitals hold memorial services) or a memory box or scrapbook.

You may need to allow feelings of grief, sadness, anger, loneliness or emptiness for a time. You may need to know that it is also alright to feel moments of happiness and joy. This is not disrespectful to the loved one who has died. It is a reflection of the need for you to keep on living.

Adjustment following a death can take time. There is no right amount of time to grieve.

Each person will take as much time as they need. If you are having trouble with your grief, talk to your GP. There are things that can help. This may be a support group or finding someone special to talk with such as a grief or bereavement counsellor.

*CareSearch is a website that has been developed to provide trustworthy information about palliative care. For more information on this topic visit [www.caresearch.com.au](http://www.caresearch.com.au)*