



FACT SHEET

Coping with Grief

Grief is a normal and inevitable response to loss, it can affect many aspects of our lives. Grief can seem overwhelming and at times frightening.

Grief allows us to gradually adjust to loss and find a way of continuing on with our life without the person who has died.

Current knowledge about grief

A list of key points that can help us to understand more about grief and loss:

- Grief is a normal response to loss and bereavement.
- Grief is expressed by individuals in a wide variety of ways.
- No one can tell another how they should mourn or grieve.
- Confronting and then denying the death is a common reaction for people in grief.
- It is rare for complicated grief to require medical intervention.
- Social support networks may help to relieve bereavement.

Reactions to grief

How grief affects our mind, body and interactions with others is highly individual. There is no 'right' way to grieve. For instance:

Feelings: Intense feelings are common such as shock, sadness, anxiety, anger, disbelief, fear, numbness and even relief.

Thoughts: It may be difficult to concentrate as confused thoughts are

experienced. Some people may experience vivid dreams of the person who has died and have a sense of their presence. These are mostly comforting.

Physical: The physical symptoms of fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, sleeplessness or pain may be physical reactions to grief and loss. Check with your doctor if these symptoms persist.

Relationships: People react differently to grief. Some may turn to being busy and active a lot of the time, others may feel lethargic and retreat to bed. Little attention may be made to self-care. For others, turning to the overuse of alcohol or non-prescribed drugs and other potentially harmful behaviours may occur. Again, talk to a health care professional for advice.

Beliefs: Grief can challenge our beliefs, we may wonder 'Why has this happened to me?'

There is no right or wrong way to grieve, just as there is no timeline for it. As time passes we learn to manage grief. Some people will want to express their grief by talking and crying, others may be more reluctant to talk. It is important to respect an individual's way of grieving, even within families.

Self care through hard times.

- Start a journal and write or draw about your innermost thoughts and emotions. This is one way, a private way, of expressing your emotions so that the process of recovery can move forward.
- Do gentle exercise to release 'pent-up' energy such as walking, gardening, swimming, Tai Chi or stretching.
- Consider some self care techniques such as aromatherapy, massage or meditation.
- Draw on your spiritual or religious beliefs to help you through.
- Read about other's experiences, see our *Resources* section for a comprehensive book list.
- Avoid making big decisions too soon.
- Create a memorial – making or doing something in honour of the person who has died.
- Look at photos or visit special places of the person who has died. It's ok to have conversations with your loved one.

- A ritual of listening to music, lighting a candle or being in Nature, for instance, can be helpful.
- Allow others to help you and share memories and feelings with family and friends.
- Attend a Bereavement or Grief support group such as those held by TPS at Wedgetail Retreat. Or, talk with a Counsellor or Palliative Care Social Worker about how you are feeling.

Bibliography

1. Bereavement Support Group notes Tweed Palliative Support Inc and Wedgetail Retreat Hospice.
2. www.bereavementcare.com.au
3. www.caresearch.com
4. www.ekrfoundation.org
5. www.mygriefassist.com.au
6. www.palliativecare.org.au