

# Health & Wellbeing



## Grief and loss

Grief is how we respond when we experience loss. Grief allows us to adjust to our loss and find a way to continue our life without what or whom we had.

What we lose may be part of any area of life: personal, financial, social, hopes and dreams, connections, possibilities, the future. How it affects us may be unique for each of us.

### About grief

When people grieve they are coming to terms with what has changed in their lives. Following loss the grieving person has to relearn the world and themselves because something has changed. Grief is not an illness. We don't 'get over' profound grief but life will eventually have meaning again, although our loss may always be part of us. Eventually we will learn to live with our loss. It is not unusual for grief to be felt over an extended period, even many years.

### What grief feels like?

We may experience intense feelings such as sadness, anger, anxiety, disbelief, panic, relief or even numbness. It can also affect our thinking so that we may think we will never get over this or we may think we are going insane. We may think that this is all too hard and wish we were with the person who has died, if the loss is a partner, family member or close friend. This does not usually mean that we will take active steps to end life, but can simply be an expression of our pain and sadness. Sometimes grief can cause difficulty in sleeping and can lead to physical symptoms. If these symptoms persist, check with your doctor to exclude other causes.

### Areas in which you may be affected

#### Personal and emotional

Grief brought by the death of a loved one, by your or a loved one's loss of health through illness or loss of ability can have a major impact.

Growing older does not have to mean becoming ill but unfortunately the risk of illness, frailty or disability does increase with age. It is important to remember that you can maintain good health by the way you choose to live and by taking an active part

with health professionals in your care and treatment if you do become ill.

Remember too, that even though recovery from illness may take a little longer for an older person, it is usually possible for the recovery to be as complete as it would be for someone younger.

#### Loss of family structure, connections and relationships

It may be caused by the death of a loved one or even a much-loved pet, the end of a relationship or connection with something or someone meaningful to us, loss of independence, loss of work with its status, loss of a familiar environment and less visible loss due to illness or permanent loss of abilities.

#### Loss of your sense of identity due to unemployment, redundancy or retirement

As many people identify themselves by what you do for employment, the loss of paid work often means loss of a sense of self and independence. For some people paid employment has been the most important aspect of their lives and so it is very difficult to face retirement. The development of other interests, both before and after retirement, can bring unexpected rewards in enjoyment, new friends, mental stimulation and increased self-esteem.

#### Financial

Loss of paid work may mean less income. Effective financial planning can make the difference between feeling secure and being disappointed with a new lifestyle and being anxious about your finances.

#### Legal and financial issues

Seniors Information Service has an extensive range of FREE fact sheets, booklets and information packs covering the following issues: planning for retirement, wills, powers of attorney and other future plans, estates and probate, legal advice, concessions for seniors and financial planning.

#### When to seek further help

Although grief can be very painful, most people (80-85%) 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 they do not need to seek professional help.

However, sometimes the circumstances of the loss may have been particularly distressing, such as a traumatic or sudden death or there may be circumstances in your life which make your grief particularly acute or complicated. You could consider seeking professional help if you:

- Do not have people who will listen to you and care for you
- Find yourself unable to manage the tasks of your daily life, such as going to work or caring for your children
- Find personal relationships are being seriously affected
- Have persistent thoughts of harm to yourself or anyone else
- Persistently over-use alcohol and other drugs
- Experience panic attacks or other serious anxiety or depression
- Remain preoccupied and acutely distressed over time by your grief
- Feel that for whatever reason, you need help to get through this experience.

## Carers and grief and loss

Carers are usually family members or friends who provide support to children or adults who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or who are frail aged. Carers may be parents, partners, daughters, sons, siblings or friends.

Almost everyone experiences loss during their lives. However the special demands often placed upon carers can result in them experiencing an additional sense of loss and grief. Some of the losses that carers talk about include:

- Losing your sense of being an individual
- Missing out on employment/career opportunities and your financial security being affected
- Missing the relationship you had or might have had with the person for whom you care
- The person you care for going into residential care causing you to feel you are no longer valued or needed.

These kinds of losses may affect your self-esteem and confidence, your hopes and dreams about the future. You may also experience grief before an actual loss occurs. This may happen when someone you care for has a terminal illness and you know you will have to face a loss.

## Where is help available?

**Lifeline** - for telephone counselling and information.  
**Tel. 131 114** (24 hours); [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**Loss & Grief Service, Anglicare SA Inc.** - Individual or family counselling, information and resources, referrals and support groups.  
4 Angas St, Kent Town 5067  
**Tel. 8131 3410, Living Beyond Suicide, tel. 1300 761 193** (local call cost)  
[www.anglicare-sa.org.au](http://www.anglicare-sa.org.au)

**Grow (SA Branch)** - Support groups with a focus on developing and maintaining mental and emotional health.  
Unit 1, 355 Brighton Rd, Hove 5048  
**Tel. 8298 9299, 1800 558 268** (free call)  
[www.grow.net.au](http://www.grow.net.au)

**Solace Association (SA) Inc.**  
Solace is staffed by trained bereavement support workers who have lost their partners. Telephone support is available seven days a week 7am-7pm.  
DeafSA, 262 South Tce, Adelaide 5000.  
**Tel. 8272 4334;** [www.solace.org.au](http://www.solace.org.au)

Some community health services offer free counselling – contact **Seniors Information Service, tel. 8168 8776, 1800 636 368** (SA country free call) for details of your nearest service.

**Centrelink** provides unemployment benefits and linkage to job search agencies, **tel. 13 2850**. Current customers who are having personal or family difficulties can gain access to counselling services via Centrelink's Social Worker Network. **Tel. 13 1794**

The **Carer Advisory and Counselling Service** provided through **Carers SA** offers advice, resources and short-term counselling to equip carers emotionally and practically in their caring role.  
**Tel. 1800 242 636** (free call)

**Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres** provide information about support services for people who are frail aged or have a disability and their carers. **Tel. 1800 052 222** (free call)

**Seniors Information Service** has a free bereavement kit available upon request. It can be mailed free of charge within South Australia.