

# How to Support a Person in Grief

## BE PRACTICAL

Provide meals, clean, care for the children, run errands or garden.

## BE THERE

People grieve differently so the best thing to do is to ask what they need and assume nothing.

- Listen with an open heart and mind. Feelings don't need to be justified, just heard without judgment.
- Be patient. Sometimes their stories need to be told more than once and feelings can take a long time to change.
- Keep offering to help and be around.
- Silence is okay. The best you can do is be there, so just listen and breathe.
- Remember them at significant times like anniversaries, birthdays and celebrations.

## BE REAL

- Try not to fix or diminish their experience. Listening is the fixer. Ask more questions rather than give advice. Given time and information they will know what is best for them.
- Avoid clichés or comparisons which will belittle their feelings and experience. Remember you do not know what they are going through so avoid saying "I know how you feel".
- Be honest. If you don't know what to say, say that.
- Use the name of the deceased and speak of them when it feels natural to do so. They may have physically gone but their love and memories live on through you.

## Further Resources

### BOOKS

**Coping with Grief** – Mal McKissock  
**The Uses of Sadness** – Karen Massman  
**Living After Losing a Child** – Ellen Mitchell  
**Broken Open** – Elisabeth Lesser Rider  
**Now that the Funeral is Over** – Doris Zagdanski  
**Good Grief Rituals** – Elaine Childs Gowell

### BEREAVEMENT AND GRIEF SUPPORT SERVICES

**Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement**  
[www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au) | 1800 642 066

**Compassionate Friends**  
[www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au](http://www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au)  
03 9888 4944 | 1300 064 068

**Mercy Western Grief Services** – 1300 657 259  
**Road Trauma Support Team** – 1300 367 797  
**Sids and Kids Victoria** – 1800 240 400  
**Victims Support Agency** – 1800 819 817  
**Lifeline** – 13 11 14  
**Griefline** – 1300 845 745  
**Mensline** – 1300 78 99 78

### INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

General Practitioner	Hypnotherapy
Grief Counselling	Emotional Freedom
Art Therapy	Kinesiology E.M.D.R.
Traditional Chinese	Mindfulness Meditation
Medicine	Yoga

For 24 Hour Service and Enquiries  
please telephone our Funeral Advice Line: **13 19 34**

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## The Process of Grief

*This brochure aims to assist with an introductory understanding of the grief process, and gives some suggestions about supporting the bereaved.*

# The Process of Grief

**“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss and have found their way out of the depths.**

**These persons have an appreciation, sensitivity and an understanding, which fills them with compassion, gentleness and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”**

*- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross*

Bereavement is the experience of loss after a death.

Grief is the natural healing process after any loss. Our brains physically change when we are in grief and due to these changes we can be forgetful, disorientated, confused, impulsive and emotional. If we could see how we feel, we may have a limb missing or perhaps gaping wounds in the chest or stomach. That is why we need time to heal and transform and grief gives us that time.

Grief is an individual experience and it is up to us to acknowledge how big our wound is and what we need to heal and transform.

Just like a wound there are phases to healing and ups and downs. The grief process will vary for each person due to:

- Personal meaning and worth attached to that which is lost.
- Age.
- Previous grief and life experiences.
- Trauma associated with the loss.
- Culture.
- Associated guilt.
- Associated anger and resentments.
- Expected or sudden loss.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve, there is only what works and doesn't work for the individual. What works is anything that supports our healing and does not cause harm to us or others.

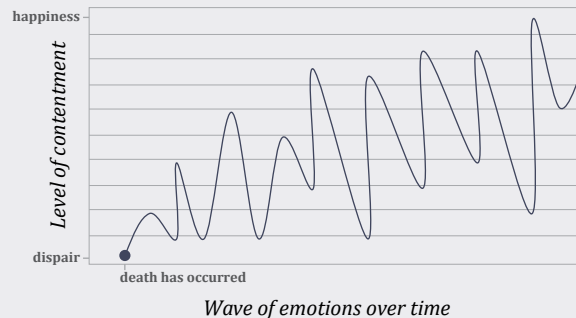
We can use the pain of grief to:

1. Understand, reflect on, love and honour what was.
2. Let go of what no longer serves us.
3. Accept what is.
4. Make decisions about what is important and how life will be from now on.
5. Grow into a new way of being and find a life with new meaning.
6. Remain connected to our loved one.

Grief is a normal part of life. We are all different; some people need a lot of time alone while others like to keep busy doing things. The outward behaviour of a person does not tell us if they are grieving or not, it is what they are processing on the inside.

As we respond to grief, it is normal to alternate between times of focusing on what is lost and then on what we have. This focus can change all the time as new waves of emotion drive us to reach out and keep going, or to stop and withdraw.

Overwhelming feelings of pain, chaos and exhaustion are normal. These feelings can return suddenly, even years later, because grief integrates and becomes part of who we are. It is not something to get over or stop, but something to feel, connect with, learn and grow from. The pattern of grief can vary for each person but the graph below gives an idea of how it can be.



The length of each wave will vary for each individual and is completely unpredictable. Just one day can be full of tears, despair, love and laughter.

# Supporting Yourself

Life has changed and with that change you will have new needs and so you will need new skills.

## THESE NEW NEEDS MAY BE:

*Autonomy and Independence*

*New Meaning or Purpose*

*Isolation:* for contemplation, self expression, prayer meditation.

*Connection:* Affection, compassion, being heard, supportive friends, practical friends.

*Security:* Finances, a safe place, commitment from others.

*Physical needs:* Nourishment, exercise, sleep.

*Emotional needs:* Talking with family, friends, support groups, writing.

*Movement:* Exercise, walk, dance, yoga, etc.

*Creative expression:* Form a foundation, art or craft, renovations, gardening, make a memory box or book.

*Meditation/Prayer*

*Acknowledging and Validating your feelings*

Find the people and information you need to support you with these changes. You do not need to do it all on your own. See the back of this brochure for resources.

It is normal, and helpful, to keep your connection to your loved one who has died through talking to them, visiting special places, taking action in their name, making things with them in mind, looking at photos, having keepsakes.

## REMEMBER:

- Take time to check in and see how you are on the inside as well as the outside.
- Ask yourself what you need to feel better that is possible right now and get those needs met.
- If you feel stuck in one place in your grief, at any time, even years or decades later, it is never too late to ask for help.