
Dealing with grief and loss

Summary

- Grief and loss arises not only from the death of a loved one but also from a range of other losses such as the loss of control and independence that might come with getting older.
- Feelings of grief and loss can have a great effect on your physical health, your mental wellbeing, your financial situation and much more. It is important to acknowledge that these feelings are completely normal.
- There are strategies and services available to help you to deal with grief and loss.
- There are telephone helplines such as Lifeline (13 11 14) and GriefLine (1300 845 745) that can help you find ways of coping with grief and loss.
- Call The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement on 1300 664 786 for information and referral to bereavement services available in Victoria.

Grief and loss happens not only because of the death of a loved one but also because of a range of other losses in a person's life. These include the loss of control and independence that might come with getting older and not being able to do the things they once enjoyed. Some older people might feel as though they have lost their 'voice' and no longer have a say in their day-to-day care and activities. People with dementia and their carers may feel grief and loss as their dementia progresses. Others may feel a loss of all things familiar by moving out of their family home and into residential aged care.

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Grief does not have a timeline and you may feel it over an extended period. With the support of family and friends, most people gradually find ways to learn to live with grief and loss. However, for some, it may be helpful to seek professional support such as grief counselling. There are strategies and bereavement services available to help you manage feelings of grief and loss.

Experiencing grief and loss

Everyone experiences grief and loss differently. You might feel teary, sad, angry, frustrated, confused, anxious or resentful. These can all be expressions and symptoms of grief and loss. Your feelings of grief and loss might be so complicated and deeply rooted that you and others around you do not recognise them.

Everyone grieves in their own way. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, so long as you are not causing harm to yourself or those around you.

Strategies for dealing with grief and loss

Just as people experience grief and loss differently, people also find different ways to help them deal with feelings of grief and loss. Some of the following strategies might help:

- Cry – some people feel that crying is not appropriate; others are afraid that once they start crying, the tears will not stop. If you feel the need to cry, go ahead and cry. If possible, try and cry with someone else, but you can also cry alone if you'd prefer. Crying is a normal human response to intense feelings, but even if you do not cry, it does not mean you are not feeling grief.
- Spend some time alone – if you feel the need, schedule some time alone each day to focus on your feelings and to express them in whichever way feels natural to you. For example, you may choose to take time out and acknowledge how you feel, sit in a garden or park, pray, cry, look through photographs or write in a diary.
- Do some physical activity – for some people, engaging in physical activity is a way of releasing tension and distracting themselves from the intensity of grief. If you physically can, think about going for a walk, joining a

walking group or taking part in a group exercise class.

- Pamper yourself – include activities in your daily or weekly schedule that you enjoy. If you can, choose the activity that brings you the greatest comfort.
- Seek out support – this could include old and new friends, relatives, doctors, a community health centre, a grief support group or a professional counsellor. However, it is also okay if you feel like being alone.
- Get professional help – call a helpline such as Lifeline (13 11 14) and GriefLine (1300 845 745) for support and advice (see below).
- Get emergency help – **call triple zero (000)** if you feel distressed enough to want to hurt yourself or someone else.

Grief and loss support services

Talking things through with someone can help. Sometimes you might want to talk things through with someone you do not know. There are several telephone helplines available in Victoria that can help you find ways to manage feelings of grief and loss.

If you are in an emergency, are in danger or have harmed yourself, call triple zero (000) for emergency services. If you are on a mobile phone, 112 is another emergency number that will connect you directly to emergency services.

Crisis counselling for grief and loss

If you need immediate help, you can access crisis support and counselling services 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week.

You can find someone to talk to through one of these helplines:

- **Lifeline** – call 13 11 14 for this Australia-wide crisis support and suicide prevention service.
- **beyondblue** – call 1300 224 636 for support for issues relating to anxiety and depression.

Grief and loss counselling services

If you do not need crisis support, then try one of the following services:

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement offers a specialist grief service for people who need help after the death of someone close to them. They can connect you to other bereavement services in Victoria, but they do not offer a telephone counselling service. To access this service, call 1300 664 786, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

The Bereavement Counselling and Support Service - depending on your individual circumstances, the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement may provide you with direct counselling support, through this service located at 253 Wellington Road, Mulgrave, Victoria 3170. For further information phone (03) 9265 2100 or email counselling@grief.org.au

GriefLine is an Australia-wide grief helpline that offers free telephone, online and face-to-face grief counselling services. Call (03) 9935 7400 or 1300 845 745 to access anonymous and confidential telephone support.

Where to get help

- Your local doctor
- The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, call 1300 664 786
- GriefLine, call 1300 845 745
- **Carers Victoria** , call 1800 242 636
- **Seniors Rights Victoria** , call 1300 368 821

- **Council on the Ageing Victoria** , call (03) 9654 4443

- **Personal Alert Victoria**

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