

# Grief and loss

Aboriginal Parent Easy Guide



Parenting SA

Our families and communities are dealing with grief a lot of the time. When we feel overwhelmed with sadness we can forget that our children are grieving too. Children need our help to deal with their feelings and to make sense of it all.

## Children and adults can grieve when there is:

- > the death of a loved one – parent, child, brother, sister, grandparent
- > separation from family members
- > the feeling you have ‘lost’ someone through their use of drugs or alcohol
- > serious illness or disability
- > the loss of a job or relationship
- > loss of friends and other connections when moving house or schools.



Children need your love and support during times of grief.

## The loss of culture, identity, land and language

Some of us feel grief from things that have happened in the past. Although we might never truly ‘get over’ these things, as time passes we can find ways to live with our feelings and begin to move on. It’s important to find healthy ways to deal with our feelings so we can be positive and support our children.

In times of grief we can come together and find strength in culture and community.



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Helping parents be their best



*Young children may not have the words to say how they feel - they often show it in how they act.*

### **In times of grief we can:**

- > feel sad, hurt, angry, alone or in a state of shock
- > worry about how others will cope
- > feel 'drained', 'weighed down' or 'flat', not eat or sleep.

Physical or mental health problems can get worse too.

### **Grief can also affect how we:**

- > cope with daily life
- > treat our children, partner or family
- > take care of ourselves.

Some people turn to alcohol, drugs or gambling to avoid the pain but this only makes things worse. We have to deal with our feelings eventually.

### **Children and grief**

Children grieve from an early age. They can grieve over the same things as adults, as well as things that don't seem important to adults, e.g. losing a special possession.

Young children may:

- > cry a lot and be more 'needy'
- > not want to be left alone
- > not sleep as well, have headaches, tummy aches or wet the bed.

Older children might:

- > become angry or start acting up
- > want to be left alone or not want to talk
- > block out feelings by using alcohol, drugs, online games, social media or the internet.

### **You can help children by:**

- > being honest - tell them what's happened in ways that suit their age
- > talking about death and what it means
- > letting them know it's OK to feel sad and you are sad too
- > helping them express their feelings through play, art, writing, music or dance
- > making sure they have trusted people to talk to such as family, friends or a school counsellor
- > involving children in funerals. They need to say goodbye too. If you are too upset to help your children, make sure someone else is there for them.

## Healthy grieving

The way we grieve is important. These are some 'healthy' ways to help adults and children deal with their feelings.

- > **Spend time together as family.** Talking and listening can really help.
- > **Connect with culture.** For some this might mean going 'back to country', attending ceremonies, going camping, gathering bush food or hunting. For others it might mean going to cultural events or learning about things such as family history, language, art, craft or music. If you are not that connected with culture you could create your own way of saying goodbye. You could plant a tree, create a special place in your garden in memory of the person or go to a special place that reminds you of them.
- > **Remember the good times.** Tell stories about the person and their life - where they came from, what they did and the good memories you have of them.
- > **Look after yourself.** Take time to do things you enjoy – eat well, be active and get as much rest as you can.
- > **Get support.** Sometimes when everyone is affected by grief, we need to share our stories with people outside the family. If you or someone you know seems to be struggling it's good to talk to someone who knows about grief. Your Aboriginal health service or doctor is a good place to start.

When children see you grieving in 'healthy' ways, they learn that difficult feelings can be managed.

## Look out for others

If someone is talking about suicide, self-harm or hurting others take it seriously and get help immediately.



## Services

### Aboriginal health services

#### Adelaide

##### Nunkuwarrin Yunti, Adelaide:

Phone 8406 1600

##### Wonggangga Turtpandi Primary Health Care Centre,

##### Port Adelaide:

Phone 8240 9611

##### Maringga Turtpandi, Hillcrest:

Phone 7425 8900

##### Southern Adelaide Local Health Network,

##### Aboriginal Primary Health Services:

Noarlunga Phone 8384 9577

Clovelly Park Phone 8179 5900

##### Muna Paiendi Health Service, Elizabeth:

Phone 8182 9206

#### Country centres

##### Pangula Mannamurna Health Service, Mount Gambier:

Phone 8724 7270

##### Ceduna/Koonibba Aboriginal Health Service:

Phone 8626 2600

##### Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Service:

Phone 8683 0162

##### Southern Fleurieu Health Service, Aboriginal Health Service, Victor Harbor:

Phone 8552 0600

##### Pika Wiya Community Health Centre, Port Augusta:

Phone 8642 9999

##### Riverland Community Health Service, Barmera Hospital:

Phone 8588 0420

##### Nunyara Wellbeing Centre, Whyalla:

Phone 8649 9900

##### Murray Bridge Aboriginal Primary Health Care Unit:

Phone 8535 6800

##### Port Pirie Regional Health Service, Aboriginal Health Team:

Phone 8638 1100

##### Umoona Tjutagku Health Service, Coober Pedy:

Phone 8672 5255

##### Tullawon Health Service Inc, Yalata:

Phone 8625 6237

##### Nganampa Health Council, Alice Springs:

Phone 8952 5300

### Helplines

**Lifeline:** Phone 13 11 14, 24 hours

Crisis support and suicide prevention [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**Beyond Blue:** Phone 1300 224 636, 24 hours

Speak to a mental health professional about how you feel no matter how big or small the problem [www.beyondblue.org.au/resources/for-me/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/resources/for-me/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people)

**Mensline Australia:** Phone 1300 789 978, 24 hours

Speak to someone about relationship or family concerns [www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)

### Grief and loss

**'Grief and Loss: Help for Aboriginal People Going Through Grief':** Aboriginal Health Council 'Rising Spirits' [www.ahcsa.org.au](http://www.ahcsa.org.au)

**Australian Indigenous Health Infonet:** Information for parents and workers on a variety of Aboriginal topics [www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/other-health-conditions/sewworkers/grief-loss-trauma/key-facts](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/other-health-conditions/sewworkers/grief-loss-trauma/key-facts)

**Hope for Life:** Suicide prevention and support after a death [www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au](http://www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au)

**Palliative Care SA:** Phone 8271 1643

Information and support for people suffering from a terminal illness and their family [www.pallcare.asn.au/info-resources/aboriginal-palliative-care-resources](http://www.pallcare.asn.au/info-resources/aboriginal-palliative-care-resources)

#### Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department for Education and Child Development and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

Phone (08) 8303 1660 • [www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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