

Grief and loss

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.

ParentLink

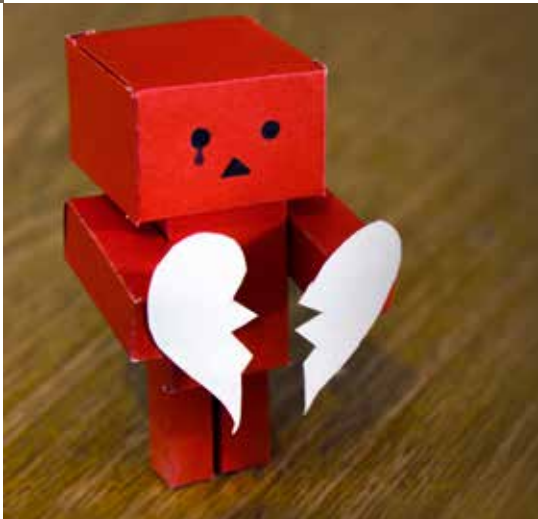
informing



supporting



connecting



Children and adults can grieve

People 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.

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

Please note: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this website may contain images, voices or names of deceased persons in photographs, film, audio recordings or printed material.

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.

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.



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AN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARENTLINK GUIDE

www.parentlink.act.gov.au

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Look out for others

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



This guide's content was produced by Parenting SA, Women's and Children's Health Network.

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

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Looking for more information?

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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.

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

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.



ParentLink—for other parenting guides, online parenting information www.parentlink.act.gov.au

Child and Family Centres—for parenting information and support
www.communityservices.act.gov.au/ocys/childandfamilycentres

Raising Children's Network—covering topics for parenting newborns to teens <http://raisingchildren.net.au>

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation t 6296 8900 www.gugan-gulwan.com.au

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service t 6284 6222 www.winnunga.org.au

Relationships Australia Dhunlung Yarra Service is dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples t 6122 7100 www.racr.relationships.org.au