

Tips for Wellbeing Series No 11

Coping with Grief and Loss

What is grief and loss?

All of us will experience loss at some point in our lives, whether it be from the death of a loved one, a relationship ending, miscarriage, children leaving home, migrating to another country or something else. Grief is our normal and natural response to loss and can affect us in many ways, including our thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, feelings, health and relationships with others.

What might you experience when grieving?

Everyone grieves in their own unique way, the intensity of grief, how long it lasts, and our reactions to it will differ. Some reactions include:

- > Feeling sad or down, crying
 - > Shock, feeling 'numb' or confused
 - > Feeling stressed or anxious
 - > Anger, guilt, or shame
 - > Tendency to withdraw and be alone
 - > Physical health problems – eg headaches
 - > Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
 - > Difficulties with concentration
 - > Not enjoying usual activities or hobbies
- Support groups can provide an opportunity to share experiences and find new strategies for dealing with difficulties

extended period, as it takes time to adjust to the loss.

What can be done about it?

Whether you are grieving, or supporting someone who is-

- > Develop a support plan for getting through days that may be more difficult, eg birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas.
- > Do things that are relaxing and soothing, eg take warm baths, get a massage, walk in nature, practice meditation etc.
- > Develop self-compassion, if someone you cared about was suffering, what kind of things would you consider saying and doing for them? You could try talking to, and caring for yourself that way.
- > Do things you enjoy (or used to enjoy), even if you don't really feel like doing them.

With others

- > Talk to family and friends; sharing memories, thoughts and feelings can be comforting and provide a sense of connection.
- > Let people help-it may be useful to tell family and friends how you feel and what they can do to help (often others want to help but they might not know what you need or want).
- > It might help to talk to a professional, or to someone who has been through a similar experience, and can understand what you are going through.

For someone else

- > Be available and let them know you that you care, listen to their story (if they choose to share it) and acknowledge that their loss is important.
- > Provide practical help, ask them how you can help, try not to assume what they will need.
- > Keep in touch by being available and checking-in, it can help to remember to keep them included in activities.
- > Be aware of signs that they are not coping – this could include things like withdrawing, substance use, getting stuck in grief, or expressions of suicidality. Where appropriate, connect them to additional supports.
- > Encourage and model good self-care.

When to seek further help

Over time, most people will adjust and be able to remember what they have lost without being emotionally overwhelmed. For some, this is managed with the support of family and friends and their own resources; for others, having the support of a counsellor or other health professional may be helpful in getting through the most difficult times and developing coping resources.

For further reference

Websites:

- > Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement – grief.org.au
- > Bereavement Care Centre - bereavementcare.com.au

Books:

- > *Coping with Grief (4th Ed.)* by Mal McKissock and Dianne McKissock (2012) ABC Books
- > *The Reality Slap* by Russ Harris (2012) New Harbinger Publications

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