

## Self Care for loss and grief

- Understand the stages of grief and loss.
- Recognise the variety of normal responses to loss and accept the stage you are at.
- If you get stuck for a long time in a specific type of emotional reaction, seek out friends, family or professional help to get clear about what is going on for you.
- Don't expect too much from yourself — be kind, and allow yourself some time to function below par.
- Avoid setting difficult goals or taking on too much responsibility soon after the loss.
- Avoid making major decisions in the midst of strong grief.
- Avoid extra stress or big changes — they can create too much tension.
- Take breaks (days out, evenings out, a trip, a visit etc). Take time to do some of those things you find enjoyable and relaxing.
- Get some exercise to help work off bottled up feelings, to help you relax and sleep better.
- Talk to friends or family. In addition, often it is helpful to talk to someone independent, such as your EAP professional, who is not too close to the situation.

The ideas and strategies outlined in this brochure are often beneficial, but are not comprehensive. Assistance from a professional counsellor may help you to make quicker progress. Remember to use your workplace EAP as a resource.

**Call your EAP on  
1800 056 076**

Gryphon Psychology provide a free professional, independent and confidential counselling and consulting service. This service assists employees in both the private and public sectors to find solutions to any work or personal/family problems that are affecting their quality of life and which may be impacting on their effectiveness at work. If needed, our counsellors can make referrals to specialist agencies for particular problems, or for ongoing support.

**Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is completely confidential, and provided by your employer at no cost to you.**



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**Dealing with  
Grief and Loss**

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# **Loss is a normal part of everyone's life. The human response to intense feelings of loss is grief. The grieving process is hard on the person, bringing much pain and emotional anguish, and physical exhaustion.**

Such a difficult process has a positive side — the individual eventually reaches a point where they want to put it behind them and get on with their life. Unresolved grief can be detrimental to physical and mental health.

The following is a list of common responses to loss. Grief can be experienced in a variety of ways depending on:

- i. The type of person you are
- ii. The meaning that you give to the loss, and
- iii. The circumstances of the loss.

**Shock:** the body goes into a temporary state of flux. The person's world may seem to have crashed down around them. People report going about their normal activities automatically. People can also experience sleeplessness, loss of appetite and physical symptoms.

**Denial:** initial disbelief. Denial tends to resolve over time, especially as the reality of the loss becomes obvious, e.g. at a funeral.

**Emotional outpouring:** crying and screaming is a common emotional release which relieves stress. Grieving people should be allowed to release like this for as long as it takes.

**Depression:** sufferers may feel they will never recover or be happy again. Also the realisation of not having their loved one around sometimes leads to panic.

**Guilt:** can occur when analysing how things could have been handled differently.

**Anger:** this is a healthy sign of healing as the person is now strong enough to challenge the event and vent their feelings in full force.

**Acceptance:** the realisation that the future may not be as bleak as first thought.

**Detachment:** the loss begins to be filed away as a memory of the past, and new routines in life start to emerge.

**Coping:** people start to build a new life for themselves. It is a good idea to avoid making major decisions during the grief process. Instead, attend to your physical health with exercise, eat a healthy diet, and avoid alcohol and drugs which exacerbate the problems and hinder the process.

The grieving process can take many months to fully complete — in some circumstances, it can take years. The grieving process should not be rushed or even controlled.

**The process should be left to run naturally, for however long it takes. Often grieving people require professional assistance.**

## **Assisting children through grief**

**Just like adults, children need as much care and attention during times of grief. Depending on their age, they can experience the same feelings of loss and must also travel through the grieving process.**

You must ensure that the child fully understands what has happened at the current level of their understanding. Be accurate and clear, and ensure they know the truth at every stage — they will have to face the truth at some stage... better sooner than later.

## **Do men and women differ?**

Some research suggests that men tend not to express their grief outwardly (eg crying), except when they are very young or when they are much older (eg over 60 years). It has been suggested that men between 15 and 60 years actually produce less tears and are therefore less able to pour out emotion through crying.

Instead of crying, men are more likely to deal with their loss through action, eg, doing things in service of the lost one rather than sitting in deep reflection or sadness. Women on the other hand (in general) seem more able to express sadness through crying, talking, and open communication.

Other reasons why men may cry less are linked to the socialisation of men in our culture. Boys may be encouraged to show strength by holding back sadness — this may be seen as a sign of toughness.

## **When to use professional help?**

In some situations the grieving person may benefit from professional help to ensure they fully understand, manage and accept the emotions associated with the loss. Some examples include:

- A grieving person gets stuck in one type of reaction or another, e.g. depression, unresolved guilt, anger or anxiety.
- A grieving person lives alone and has few people with whom to share the loss.
- The loss involved a severe trauma, e.g. motor vehicle accident, suicide, etc.