

# Grief



## What is grief?

Grief is a natural response you experience when you lose someone close to you. Grieving is a normal part of life and it can begin as soon as someone becomes aware of a loss and can continue over the course of the first 12 months.



Although there are many different kinds of 'loss', this fact sheet looks at grief after the death of someone close.

## Feelings of grief

There is no single 'right' way to cope with the loss of a friend or loved one. Young people may experience:

<b>Shock and disbelief</b> that the person has died	<b>Longing for the person;</b> wishing they were around to be able to touch them or be comforted by them
<b>Anger or resentment for being abandoned,</b> for the unfairness of the loss, or towards those thought to be responsible for the loss	<b>Sadness that the person has gone</b>
<b>Guilt</b> that they were unable to save the person, or that they survived while their loved one did not	<b>Anxiety about the future;</b> how things will be without their loved one, or their own safety
<b>Preoccupation</b> with thoughts of the person who has died	<b>Difficulty concentrating and remembering things</b>
<b>Changes to sleep patterns and appetite</b>	<b>Physical changes</b> including headaches, feeling tired, muscle aches, and nausea



Grief is experienced in different ways by different people. Young people may have different reactions to adults because of:

- their age and developmental stage,
- the consequences for them may be different and
- their family situation.

## How young people respond to grief

It is important to acknowledge that young people will respond to grief in a range of ways. Some young people will choose to express their grief through rituals or creative expression such as art or music, some will talk about it, while others may appear to be unaffected and getting on with their life.



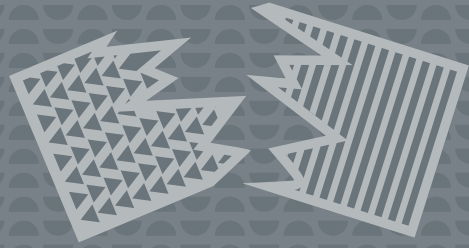
There will also be some young people who behave in ways that are disruptive, frustrating or risky; they might drink alcohol or use drugs to try to cope with their grief. Whatever their response they will need time, support and understanding as they find their way through their grief.

## Grief and mental health problems



Most young people will be resilient and will carry on with their lives while moving through the grieving process. For some however, the loss may be associated with the development of more serious mental health problems that will require specialist assessment and treatment.

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## How to support young people in the grieving process

Families are extremely important in supporting a young person who is grieving. Continuing your family life and staying connected with friends and activities allows the young person to maintain a sense of safety and security, and to feel hopeful about the future.

It can be particularly challenging for families to support each other when a family member has died because everyone will grieve in different ways. Professional support might be helpful if you're finding it difficult to support each other through a loss.



## Supporting young people to seek help

The grieving process can take time and it is not unusual for young people to experience ups and downs over months or years while dealing with the death of a loved one. People generally find that things get easier as time passes; however, if the young person's grief is persistent and severe, getting help is important. Accessing professional support is particularly important if the young person is grieving for someone who has died by suicide.

It is important to support young people in finding a health professional such as a general practitioner (GP) or counsellor who they trust and feel comfortable with. If they have had a positive experience with a family GP or another health professional in the past encourage them to contact them again. You could also support them to contact your local community health centre or **headspace** centre.

## Some other strategies that may be helpful in supporting a young person include:



**Acknowledging their loss** and the need to take time to grieve



**Providing information about normal patterns of grief**



**Encouraging them to do what's right for them**



**Encouraging their continued participation in enjoyable activities** such as sports or hobbies, and family activities



**Supporting them as they gather stories and memories of the loved one** in ways that appeal to them (e.g. writing, photos, journals, talking, blogs or memorials)



**Helping them to anticipate times that may be particularly difficult**, (e.g. Christmas, birthdays or anniversaries) and develop a plan for coping with these periods



**Helping them find meaning in what has happened** and foster a sense of hope for the future.



**headspace**  
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)