

Grief and loss

Aboriginal Parent Easy Guide

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, close friends
- > 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.



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.
- > use drink/gambling/drugs to try and cope with loss and grief we feel

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.



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Helplines

Parentline NSW

Phone 1300 1300 52

9am - 9pm weekdays and 4pm-9pm weekends for advice on child health and parenting.

Kids Helpline

Phone 1800 551 800, 24 hours

Telephone and web counselling for young people aged 5–25 years.

www.kidshelpline.com.au

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636 or 03 9810 6100

www.beyondblue.org.au

The Beyond Blue website has fact sheets and information on mental health, and a Web Chat service 7 days a week from 4pm to 10pm or you can call them 24/7 on 1300 22 4636 to speak to a Beyond Blue counsellor.

Legal Aid NSW:

Phone 1300 888 529

Free legal advice and information.

www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Mental Health Access Line: 1800 011 511

Domestic Violence Line: 1800 656 463

SIDS and Kids: 1300 308 307

Safe sleeping for Babies: www.sidsandkids.org

Child Abuse Report Line: Phone 131 478, 24 hours

If you are worried a child is being abused or neglected. You can ask to speak to an Aboriginal worker if available.

Healthdirect: Phone 1300 022 222, 24 hours to speak to a nurse.

www.healthdirect.gov.au

Australian Indigenous Health Infonet:

Information for parents and workers on a variety of Aboriginal topics.

www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/other-health-conditions/sewbworkers/grief-loss-trauma/key-facts

Mensline Australia: 1300 789 978, 24 hours

Speak to someone about relationship or family concerns.

www.mensline.org.au

Healthy Minds: 1300 137 237

Healthy Minds allows people who have a health care card to access a psychologist at no cost. You will need to go to your GP and ask for a Healthy Minds referral under the 'Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS)', and your GP will have a list of participating psychologists that they can refer you to.

Websites

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For parenting information www.raisingchildren.net.au

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Various resources to help parents at any stage in life.

Local Services

Aboriginal Legal Service Lismore:

Phone 1800 643 - ALS Lismore

3/15 Molesworth Street, Lismore NSW 2480

Phone 02 6623 4400

Headspace

2A Carrington Street, Lismore, New South Wales

Phone 02 6625 0200

Fax 02 6625 0299

Email enquiries@headspace-lismore.org.au

www.facebook.com/headspacelismore

Gurgan Bulahnggelah Aboriginal Health (Jullums)

Phone 02 6621 4366

Provides a range of medical and general health services, including counselling referrals and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and adults.

www.gurgun.com.au

Aboriginal Outreach Worker and Counsellor - Interrelate

Phone 02 6623 2750

Yarning and counselling, running health and wellbeing workshops, and empowering people to make positive and healthier life choices.

Child and Adolescent Trauma Counselling Service

Northern Rivers Community Gateway

Email reception@communitygateway.org.au

Phone 02 6621 7397

Brighter Futures

Phone 02 6621 6992

Support and services to improve the emotional, social, health and educational developmental outcomes for families and their children.

Refer to Service Listing for contact details of other local services