Life with loss and grief

Tools and techniques to help you manage bereavement:
- Understand loss and grief
- Find ways to work through grief
- Look after yourself and others
- Finding extra support
Understand loss and grief

Grief is a natural response that people experience in different ways. It may affect your emotions, physical health, thoughts and behaviour. It can also make you question your values and beliefs.

Grief is different for everyone

Each person will grieve differently and experience a range of emotions, including sadness, anger, shock, regret, relief, isolation, numbness, hopelessness and irritability. These may be unusual for you, but are all normal reactions to loss.

These emotions can come and go, and are sometimes triggered by events and memories. Immediately after losing someone is usually the most emotional period. You may find yourself:
- going through the motions of daily life;
- experiencing changes in your thinking/physical health; and
- surrounding yourself with people – or just wanting to be alone.

There's no right or wrong way to grieve, and whatever way you experience grief, there are some common physical and emotional symptoms. It's important to take the space and time you need. You'll progressively heal and return to your routines, creating new experiences and building new ways to manage your loss.

Find ways to work through grief

One of the hardest parts of grief is not knowing what to expect, especially in the first few months. It's a very individual experience with no set pattern, so figuring out what to do isn’t always clear.

Dealing with your feelings

Bereavement involves processing emotions and creating meaning out of your loss. It can involve redefining yourself and your place in the world. There's no magical formula to moving forward, but avoiding pain and sadness can lead to emotional and physical problems later on.

Allow yourself to feel the full impact of your loss so you can move forward over time. How long it takes to grieve can vary from person to person. It’s important not to feel guilty or question how long it takes you or others to grieve.

As you eventually begin to re-engage with your routine, you will slowly experience a greater sense of hope, focusing more on the future rather than the loss itself. Eventually, memories can become a positive point of reflection rather than a trigger of sadness.

Many circumstances can influence how you cope with loss and how you express your emotions:
- your existing level of wellbeing
- your relationship with the person who has passed
- the events surrounding their death
- other cultural factors

Some people grieve for months, while for others it may be years.
Breaking the news
Sharing news of your loss can be very difficult. How you do this depends on your relationship to the person you’re telling and their relationship to the person who has died.

To help you through this, try preparing what you want to say. Having a close family member or friend with you might give you support, or asking someone else to break the news for you.

Each person will react in their own way and timeframe, often differently to what you’d expect. This can be challenging, but remember grief is different for everyone.

Breaking the news to children
Explaining things to a child can be even more difficult. Clear and honest communication will help avoid confusion. Very direct language such as ‘dead’ or ‘has died’ seems harsh, but can prevent misunderstanding. Answering questions truthfully can also help children come to terms with the loss more quickly.

Breathing exercises can help
Focused breathing can help with stress and anxiety in just a few minutes:

1. Deepen your breathing, and let your breath flow deep down into your belly (without forcing it).
2. Breathe in through your nose for four seconds, then out through your nose for four seconds.
3. Continue breathing in and out for up to five minutes.

Other ways to look after yourself and others
While everyone navigates a different path when dealing with loss, it’s important to find ways to grieve and heal.

Don’t battle alone
Sharing your feelings can help to process them. Engage family, friends or even a professional such as your doctor or a psychologist for support.

Honour your loss
A meaningful act can help the healing process. Some examples are writing a letter or song, planting a tree, holding a memorial or treasuring a sentimental possession.

Be aware of your triggers
Have support available for when you might feel overwhelmed. Prepare a general response to condolences such as a simple, ‘Thank you. I appreciate your thoughts and support.’.

Look after yourself
Ensure you focus on your physical wellbeing and keep a healthy diet, with regular exercise and sleep too.

Re-engage with routine
Going back to work, study, recreation and socialising can help you move forward – just take things slowly.

Ask the experts
Talking to a doctor or a psychologist can be helpful if your feelings start to take a toll on you.

Don’t take risks or use distractions to mask your loss:
- Using drugs or alcohol to cope
- Engaging in too much work or activity
- Making any big, life-changing decisions
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviours
- Being too self-critical or hard on yourself.

When should you be concerned about your feelings?
Over time, the emotions you feel at first will usually feel less strong. About 15% of people experience symptoms that last for longer than a year or two.

If you’re feeling any of these emotions, it’s important to speak to your doctor or psychologist for support:
- constant feelings of emptiness and despair, and difficulty feeling any positive emotion
- ongoing negative thoughts about yourself and your self-worth
- a relentless sense of guilt and disconnection from others
- suicidal thoughts or obsession with dying
- an inability to function in life, relationships or at work, home or school.
Finding extra support

Mates in Construction
A national helpline to support construction workers who may be struggling or feeling overwhelmed with life. Members in ACT can contact Construction Charitable Works www.ccwact.com.au 1300 642 111 1800 211 470

Incolink – Victoria and Tasmania only
Incolink’s counsellors and support workers offer free confidential support services to workers in the commercial building and construction industry and their families for any issues that are causing difficulties in their lives. 1300 000 129

Lifeline
Lifeline is a confidential telephone crisis support service available 24/7. Online crisis chat is also available every evening from 8 pm to 12 midnight (AEST/AEDT). 13 11 14

Government Department of Human Services
Human Services will listen and work with you to understand your individual and cultural needs. They’ll treat you with courtesy, listen to your needs and consider your circumstances. 13 28 50 Monday – Friday 8am to 5pm

Cbus Coordinators
Our Cbus Coordinator team may be able to provide additional local support service information to members and their families. It’s important that we put you in touch with the right people during a difficult time.

To speak to your local coordinator, simply head to www.cbussuper.com.au/support/contact

Cbussuper is here to help with super

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Visit Cbus in person in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.
Details: www.cbussuper.com.au/contact

About this brochure
The health and medical information provided in this booklet is general information only and is not a substitute for advice from a qualified medical or other health professional. All care has been taken to ensure that this information is accurate and complete. This booklet was prepared in March 2019 by TAL Life Limited ABN 70 050 109 450 AFSL 237849 (TAL) in consultation with The Positivity Institute ABN 42 488 285 300 for the information of Cbus members. Neither Cbus, TAL, The Positivity Institute or their respective employees and third parties accept liability for any loss or damage caused as a result of reliance on the information provided.

References
1 Bonanno GA: Loss, trauma, and human resilience: have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events? Am Psychol 59 (1): 20-8, 2004