

The Bereavement Buddy

May 2016



Accidental Counsellor

Life does not always go to plan. Stressful situations arise and some people may find it helpful to share their experiences with others.

In many community service and other workplace environments clients may feel that they want to talk about difficulties they are going through. Having conversations such as these can be difficult both for the client and for the staff member.

When a client chooses to discuss their difficulties with staff, staff may be taking on the role of the 'accidental counsellor'. Accidental counsellor is a term commonly used to refer to staff who are not counsellors but find themselves placed in a counselling role as a result of conversations or requests for help that arise in the workplace.

Chemist assistants, beauticians, hairdressers, child care workers etc frequently find themselves in this role, it is not uncommon.

It is important to think about how you will handle

these conversations. Consider your limitations - when should you ask for help and how you can care for yourself?

Amanda Holt, director of Possum Place (New Lambton), recently commissioned training for her staff in order to help prepare them for these situations. Amanda explains "We had a lot of families going through various experiences such as moving house, renovations, having children diagnosed with autism, separation, divorce and child protection. These are not always negative experiences but can be for some. The staff were struggling with this. They wanted to help everyone and they were having trouble recognising their limitations and setting boundaries".

"Parents see us as experts on everything child related and while we are knowledgeable about lots of situations, we are not specialists on everything. Sometimes we need to step back and know our own limits. Some staff felt when they were unable to personally help a family they were letting them down. They're nurturers and have a real desire to help, but we don't always have the skills or the knowledge and can end up being burnt out by the situation."

Talking about Sensitive Issues

When clients disclose information about a stressful situation they are experiencing or have recently gone through, it can be confronting for staff and they may not know how to handle the situation.

Staff should consider their responsibilities, limitations and boundaries. It is important to handle these conversations with empathy and support without being intrusive. Staff can offer support by acknowledging the other person's feelings and listening to them. Be aware of the support services in the area so that you can share this information with the client and encourage them to access appropriate support.

Some of the difficult situations that families might want to talk to you about include:

- family conflict
- illness
- separation or divorce
- child abuse, neglect, violence or psychological abuse exposure to violence or threats of violence
- mental illness
- trauma
- loss, grief and bereavement.

When families discuss difficult issues with you it is helpful to remember:

- you are not an expert on every topic, you don't need to have an answer.
- it is best not to give an opinion; if you are asked for advice this is a good time to refer them to a professional support service. Don't get caught answering questions such as: What do you think I should do? What did I do wrong?
- listen to their concerns and acknowledge their feelings.
- if you feel that you are unable to take on this role let them know this respectfully, such as

- 'this issue is a very sensitive one for me, I don't feel strong enough to talk to you about it today. Perhaps one of the other staff could be more helpful, or I could give you the number of a support service/ hotline.'
- don't offer advice based on your own experiences.

Active Listening

We need to know our limits and be aware of the services available so that we can refer families, when appropriate. The client may not want you to go any further with the information they tell you, they may simply want someone to listen to them and display empathy for their situation.

In an accidental counsellor situation it is useful to actively listen to the person. Active listening is more than just listening, it involves verbal and non-verbal cues which show that you are engaged in what the person is saying and taking the information seriously.

Here are some tips for active listening:

- face the person and stand or sit still, don't get or look distracted focus your attention on them
- keep an open mind, don't pass judgement
- ask questions to make sure that you understand
- use a respectful and interested tone of voice
- pay attention to their non-verbal cues such as body language and tone of voice
- allow for silence to let the person gather their thoughts
- don't try to change the subject or talk about yourself
- don't speak over the top of the person.

Looking After Yourself

"We learnt that an important part of supporting families is to deal with our own stress. Staff were getting stressed and

feeling powerless. After the training we were

able to recognise that we have limitations and this is normal, not a weakness. Now staff feel validated to stop and consider how they can work with families without having to resolve everything that is happening for that family. They have become open to learning more.”

“It’s important for staff to look after themselves otherwise they will not be in a position to support others or work effectively. This may include accessing professional assistance if they feel that they need this.”

References:

Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors. (2010). Principles of active listening. Retrieved October 18, 2010, from www.aipc.net.au/articles/?p=108

Youth Coalition of the ACT. (2008). The big red book: A handbook and directory for people who work with young people in the ACT. Retrieved October 18, 2010, from www.youthcoalition.net/documents/projects/BRB/sections/Counselling.pdf

- loss of homeland/culture/language
- loss of a pet
- loss of possession/burglary/car theft
- disability/loss of independence
- infertility
- miscarriage/abortion/stillbirth
- adoption
- stolen generation/loss of identity
- losses associated with caring for someone with a chronic or life threatening illness
- loss of dreams/expectations/hopes

Supporting someone who is grieving

Someone who has experienced a loss can:

- Feel like being lost in a maze of conflicting emotions.
- Have a sense of losing control
- Be CHAOTIC

This is NORMAL following significant loss. Knowing the experience is NORMAL may not take away the pain, but will increase understanding of what is happening. It is important to know you will recover, that it will get better.

Examples of significant losses

- death of a significant person
- divorce /separation
- relationship breakdown
- retrenchment/unemployment/retirement
- loss of health/amputation/organ loss



Grandpa's Hat



Written by Jen Cowley Illustrations by Mark Horton

About the Book

Grandpa's Hat is a children's book written by Jen Cowley and illustrated by Mark Horton – developed as a resource for the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief (National Association for loss and Grief (NSW) Inc.) with the support of the combined Rotary Clubs of Dubbo and Coonabarabran.

The book's central character, Jennywren, finds resilience through talking to her farm animals following the death of her beloved grandfather.

This book is a great resource for introduction the concept of death to children and showing some of the things that may happen after a death, eg funeral, wake etc.

Proceeds from the sale of the book and from the launch went to support the work of NALAG in helping those who are grieving.

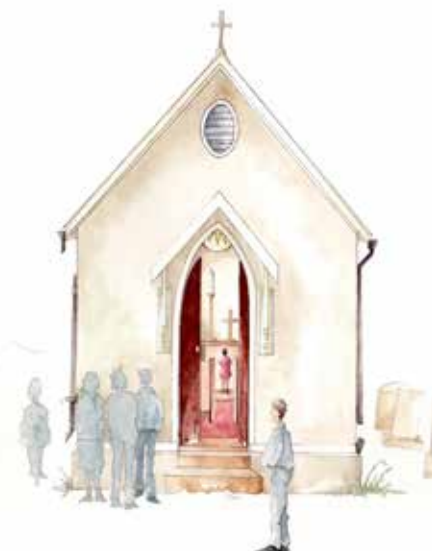
Purchase the Book or Donate

To purchase your copy of Grandpa's Hat or to make a donation please visit our website www.nalag.org.au

Purchase Limited Edition Prints

We are happy to announce that we now have available by order limited edition prints of the beautiful illustrations throughout Grandpa's Hat, signed by the artist Mark Horton.

If you would like to purchase a print, please visit our website www.nalag.org.au.



From the Manager

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief



Trudy Hanson OAM

*Grief Counsellor & Educator
Manager, NALAG Centre for
Loss & Grief, Dubbo*

Hi everyone and welcome to the May Issue of the Bereavement Buddy. We are busy at the Head Office and Centre in Dubbo developing our front Garden and re-planting the Babys Remembering Garden in preparation for our annual remembering ceremony in October.

Every year we hold Grief Awareness Month events in August and we hope that you will also plan events in your community. For help or ideas please contact us. For planned events please see our Events page of our website.

I am pleased to announce that NALAG has been promised continued funding for 2016-17 and beyond. We have not received a formal document and the money is not in the bank, however we have been promised continued funding. This is long-awaited news and once final confirmation is received there will be great cause for celebration. It is an honour and a privilege to be able to provide the services NALAG provides to the community and we are proud to be able to continue this into the future.

The NALAG Centre here in Dubbo will host a workshop by Beate Steller to provide training for new volunteers and community members. We welcome Beate back to Dubbo, her workshops are always well received and enjoyed.

Regards

Trudy

NALAG (NSW) Inc

NALAG (NSW) Inc President
Julie Dunsmore AM MAPS Psychologist

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo
MANAGER Trudy Hanson OAM

Head Office
Welchman Street, Dubbo NSW 2830

All Mail
PO Box 379, Dubbo NSW 2830
Phone: 02 6882 9222
Fax: 02 6884 9100
Email: info@nalag.org.au
Website: www.nalag.org.au

Design: Paula Hanson

Waiver

The views expressed in the Bereavement Buddy are those of the individual authors, and are not necessarily the views of the National Association for Loss & Grief (NSW) Inc.

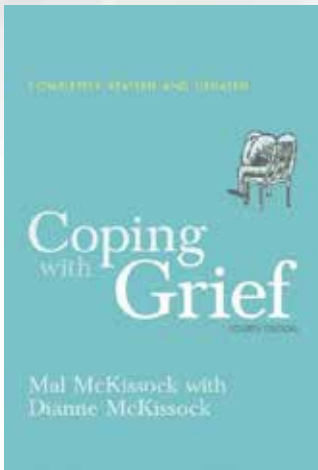
Permission to Reprint

Personal use of this material is permitted. However, permission to reprint or republish this material for advertising or promotional purposes or for creating new collective works for resale or redistribution in other works must be obtained from the individual copyright owner and all rights therein are retained by authors or by other copyright holders.

All persons copying this information are expected to adhere to the terms and constraints invoked by each authors' copyright. In most cases, these works may not be reprinted without the explicit permission of the copyright holder.

© Copyright
National Association for Loss & Grief (NSW) Inc

Resources



Coping With Grief 4th Edition

Diane McKissock, Mal McKissock

ISBN: 9780730499893
ISBN-10: 0730499898
Format: ePUB
Language: English
Number Of Pages: 112
Published: 1st March 2012

This best-selling book offers sensitive and practical advice on how to deal with the grieving process, from coping with the funeral to managing anniversaries and special dates.

Suitable for both the bereaved and their support team, it explains what to expect emotionally, psychologically and practically from the first day through the first year, as well as outlining the physical and emotional reactions to grief, why men and women react differently, how children deal with grief and some of the long-term consequences of bereavement.

Whether you have been be reaved, or are part of the bereaved's support team, this self-help

book will prove invaluable, and show you how to survive or help others survive, the most challenging experience a human being can have; the loss of a loved one.



My Grief Assist

<http://www.mygriefassist.com>

My Grief Assist is a great website where you will find a broad range of helpful information on loss and grief. Coping with grief can be a daunting, difficult time in anyone's life. Whether you're looking to support someone you know or if you need help for yourself, you'll find fact sheets, links and more on this website.

Headed by Author Doris Zagdanski, whobegan her career as a high school teacher, for the past 30 years she has been involved in the funeral industry. She has worked on the front line as a funeral director, helping families to arrange funerals and she has volunteered her time in bereavement support groups.

Same family. Different grief.

To two people grieve in exactly same way. Even in the same family, where everyone is grieving over the death of the same person, the grief will vary from one to the other. So why do we grieve the way we do - here are some reasons that explain why.

Who the person was and what they meant to you. This is all about the quality of the relationship you shared - how close and loving? How dependent? Was there ambivalence that created lots of ups and downs? How has this affected your plans and dreams with them?

It's important to note that it's often not the case of how long you knew the person but rather how strong was your connection to them?

Often the death of a younger person or a child may seem more unfair and is harder to accept than that of an older person so the grief is heightened as well.

How the person died. Was the death expected? If the person was ill, did you spend time with them? Were you the carer? Do you feel in any way responsible for the death? Were you there when it happened? Did you talk together about the things you needed to say to each other? Was the death sudden and unexpected, leaving you totally unprepared? Was there violence? An accident? Suicide? Drowning? Do you hold someone to blame? Was this reported in the media? Was there a police investigation? Was the coroner involved?. Each member of the family may cope differently with these issues.

Are there unresolved issues in the relationship? Do you have 'unfinished business' - if there was no time to say goodbye or sorry or I love you or to forgive them for a wrong? This has the potential to heighten your sense of guilt and remorseful thoughts.

Your personality. How do you usually act under stress? Are you more of an optimist than a pessimist? How are your problem solving skills? Do you speak with ease about your feelings or are you more inclined to keep them to yourself? Do you have a history of mental illness? Does your family expect you to behave in a certain way? Do you have expectations of yourself to be the 'strong one' who takes care of decisions and the rest of the family? Are you open to counselling if you needed it?

What do you do to help yourself - relaxation, meditation, exercise, eat well, get enough rest,

yoga, walk, massage, music, write about your feelings, have a spiritual connection, be patient and kind to yourself?

Are there other critical events in your past that are still up in the air or other concurrent troubles? Often unresolved issues from past events return when we are facing a current crisis. Or if we have additional situations going on right now that are troublesome we can become overburdened – too many issues to deal with at once. It can result in confusion, overwhelm, helplessness, fatigue and an overload of emotions.

What kind of support do you have? Who looks out for you? Don't kid yourself that if you have a huge circle of friends, colleagues (and Facebook friends!) that they equal support. Support means someone who stays in touch regularly and for the long haul. These friends check in with you, listen to you, let you cry if you want to and don't expect you to grieve in a certain way and to their time frame. That's support.

Source: Fact Sheet 36 Same Family Different Grief http://www.mygriefassist.com/factsheet_36.aspx

Don't Ask if I'm Okay

DON'T ask me how I'm doing
Don't ask if I'm okay
Don't say they're in a better place
As you won't like what I say

NO ... Time is not a healer
And this was NOT Gods will
If He knew how much I've really lost
They would be right here still

I WON'T try to be positive
And this wasn't for the best
My hearts in broken pieces
And it hurts deep in my chest.

Don't say, at least they're out of pain
Well I'm not, and MAY NEVER be.
Their pain is gone, but mines still here
It's been passed on to me.

Don't tell me, you know how I feel
Even though, it may be true.
This Grief is MINE
For what length of time...
It takes me, to get through.

Toni Kane (c)

For Your Diary

Education & Training

Loss & Grief First Aid 1 Day Workshop

DUBBO - Tuesday 10th May 2016
MUDGEES - Thursday 30th June 2016

About the Workshop

Often in our professional and private lives we can find ourselves in a counselling role administering loss and grief "first aid" when we are not professionally trained as counsellors. Having the skills to know how to respond appropriately and compassionately in these situations is an invaluable tool.

Learning how to provide "loss and grief" First Aid will enable you in a constructive way to be part of a person's grief journey. You will recognise where your role begins and ends in 'first aid' and how to refer people appropriately.

An Introduction to Working with Groups 1 Day Workshop

DUBBO - Tuesday, 7th June 2016

This workshop is designed to assist professionals and community support group leaders to facilitate support groups of a therapeutic nature in particular loss, grief and bereavement. The one day workshop will cover topics such as:

- Preparing for a group
- Deciding on a 'closed' or 'open' group.
- Encouraging Self/Group Support
- Are you ready for a Group? Getting YOURSELF ready for group
- The First Session.
- Tricky situations

Bookings & Enquiries

NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo
Ph: 02 6882 9222
E: education@nalag.org.au
W: www.nalag.org.au for more information.

Events

@ the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo - Welchman St, Dubbo

Mates of NALAG Morning Tea

The Mates of NALAG Morning Teas are held on the 1st Tuesday of each month at 10.00am. A mens group of friends of NALAG, this is an opportunity for anyone with a connection to NALAG or in need of friendship to come to the Centre and catch up over a tea or coffee.

Tea and Talk

The Tea and Talk group is a ladies only morning tea, held every 2nd Wednesday at the NALAG Centre in Dubbo.

@ the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Mudgee - 107 Mortimer Street, Mudgee

Yarning Group

The Yarning Group is for people who like to work with yarn (knitting, crochet etc) or for people who like a yarn (chut chat, natter etc) to come to gether in friendship and companionship.

Held at 10.00am each 3rd Tuesday each month at the NALAG Centre in Mudgee.

Mudgee Men's Group

For more information on any of these events please call the NALAG Centre in Dubbo on 02 6882 9222 or NALAG Centre in Mudgee on 0488 255 710.

Join Our Mailing List

Keep up to date with education and training on offer and we will also send you copies of The Bereavement Buddy each month. **Join Now!**