

The Bereavement Buddy

June 2016

Children Understanding Loss & Grief

Growing up is an ongoing process of change for children that involves times of loss as well as times of gain. Children grieve from an early age, but not in the same way as adults. They often grieve in bursts and can show their feelings in their behaviour and play.

Changes such as losing a family member, moving to a new home, family break-up or starting child care or school bring new feelings, challenges and learning for children. The support they receive at these times help children learn to manage and deal with losses that will happen throughout their lives.

When Children Grieve

Children can feel grief and loss over the same things as adults, e.g:

- a parent or family member dying
- parents separating or the family breaking up
- the loss of a friend or friendship
- moving house or changing schools
- having a disability
- being in hospital
- the loss of a pet



- loss of culture and homeland when moving to a new country
- loss related to crises, e.g. road accident or other community tragedy (see Parent Easy Guide 'Dealing with a crisis').

Children can also grieve over things that seem small to adults but are big to them, e.g. losing a special toy, comforter or other possession.

Children's Understanding of Death and Loss

Preschool Children

In the preschool years children don't understand that death is forever. They feel grief when they lose someone close to them. The impact of the loss may be greater because they don't really understand what's happening. They don't understand what is real and what is not real and may think they have caused what happened. They may be more clingy and needy and have trouble separating from you.

Losing someone who cares for them is a major

stress for children. It takes time and love and care to overcome.

Early Primary School

Children are beginning to learn that death is permanent and to realise that when someone dies they are not coming back. Some children may feel responsible for the death or separation and think it was because of something they did. They may also worry about who will look after them. If they have lost a parent they may worry about losing the other parent as well.

They may be very matter-of-fact in the way they talk about death and want lots of information such as what happens to the body. They may need to hear what has happened many times over. They may not know what it

is they are feeling or have the words to say how they feel. They may show their feelings in their behaviour and play.

Children feel grief and loss from a young age. They need your help to deal with their feelings.

Later Primary School

Children now understand that death is permanent. They can also understand why death happens, e.g. because of illness, accident or old age. They can talk about their feelings better although they might not always do so. They are less likely to blame themselves for what has happened but they might blame others, e.g. blame one parent for a divorce. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and might have strong views about what has happened.

They may be interested in life after death and ask questions about it. They may still want to know all the facts about what happens to the body or details of an accident.

As they get older, children are more able to understand what other people are going through.

Teenagers

Teenagers grieve in much the same way as adults. At this stage in their development they often have emotional 'ups and downs' and can become deeply distressed. They can grieve over the break-up of friendships and relationships, parents' separation or the death of someone

close. They can become withdrawn, depressed and moody. They may want to spend more time with friends than family, but they still need to know you are there to talk to if needed.

Young people often show their sadness through angry behaviours that cover up their underlying feelings. Some may turn to drugs or alcohol, drive too fast or do other dangerous things. These young people need lots of support.

Others just need to do active and noisy things, e.g. go for a run, dance to loud music or play sport with friends. Some may find comfort in art, music, writing poetry, walking alone or being in a quiet place to deal with their grief.

How Children Show Grief

Each child experiences loss differently. It can depend on their age, maturity and 'connectedness' with the person or whatever is lost. They can grieve in bursts and seem OK one moment and not the next.

Young children especially don't have the words to talk about their feelings. They may not really know what they feel. Their grief can lead to more demanding behaviour as they try to get closeness, care, information or reassurance from you.

Some of the ways children show grief are:

- physical pain, e.g. tummy aches, headaches
- sleeping problems, bad dreams, wetting the bed
- eating too much or too little
- angry play or playing the same thing over and over
- being aggressive towards parents, friends or toys
- temper tantrums
- being destructive
- being mean to others
- being sad and easily upset
- showing fears
- not wanting to be left alone
- acting like a younger child
- acting more like an adult
- not being able to concentration for long

- problems with school work
- wanting to be left alone or not wanting to talk
- crying or giggling without obvious reason
- 'switching off' and acting as if nothing has happened, running away, avoiding school, stealing
- taking risks, using alcohol or drugs.

Each child experiences grief and loss differently. It is important to work out what will best help each child.

Extra Stresses for Children

There can be extra stress for children when:

- parents or other adults are so upset they are not available to support children
- routines are suddenly changed
- people around them act differently, are upset, crying or not keeping to routines
- there are new situations to cope with, e.g. funerals, moving house
- they are asked to be different, e.g. be quiet, be helpful, be good
- they are not really sure what to think or do.

When a parent dies children need to feel they will not be abandoned.

What Parents Can Do

Help children express their feelings

- Let children know you understand they are having difficult feelings. Provide an environment where they feel safe to express their feelings in whatever way they can.
- Help them find ways to express their feelings, e.g. through play, writing a letter, a story, a poem, painting, drawing, music or reading a relevant book.
- Allow children time to talk, ask questions and share their worries. They might be very confused and need to ask lots of questions. You may have to answer the same questions over and over as children try to make sense of things.
- If a child finds it hard to talk you could open

the way by saying something like 'Some things are hard to talk about but talking things through can really help.'

- If you can't talk about it, find someone you both trust they can talk to, e.g. aunty, uncle, grandparent, teacher or counsellor. If children can't talk about the loss they may feel that it is not safe to talk about it and continue to have muddled or scary feelings.

Share Your Feelings

- Share your feelings and tell children you are sad too - it helps them accept their feelings if they know others feel the same.
- Telling children how you are managing your feelings, even if you are sad, shows them that grief can be coped with. You will help them understand grief is a normal part of life.
- If you are really distressed it may not be wise to share this too much with children - they need to feel you are in control and can keep them safe.

Be Honest

- Tell children what's happened simply and honestly in ways that suit their age and development. This helps them find ways to cope.
- If you don't tell children you may prevent them from dealing with the loss. It may cause problems when they have other losses later in life.
- Children need to know what's happened even if they don't ask.

Provide Routine and Support

- Stick to family routines as much as you can - doing the same things as usual helps children feel safe. Keep to the same rules about what children are allowed to do.
- Make extra time to spend with children and teenagers - they will need closeness and comfort.
- If your family has a spiritual belief this can be a support to children and adults.
- When the time feels right help your child or teenager to move on and try something new.

Involve Children in Funerals and Ceremonies

- When children or teenagers have lost someone close it can help to have a role in a funeral service or ceremony, or to remember the person in a special way.
- Sharing emotions and feeling connected with others can be a great support.
- You could create your own way of remembering the person, e.g. release some balloons or plant a tree.

Let your school or child care centre know what's happening - they can keep an eye on your child and may offer counselling or other support.

When Your Child Needs Extra Help

Seek help from a professional that knows about grief if your child or teenager:

- talks of not wanting to live or being better off dead
- seems to be preoccupied with death
- is acting angrily, crying, sad or depressed much of the time
- is unable to concentrate or is 'withdrawn' at school months later
- doesn't want to join in or play with other children months later.

It is important to look after yourself too. Talking with a friend and sharing your feelings can really help. Seek professional help if you need it.

Source: © Government of South Australia.
Revised:10/2015

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.

Grieve Writing Competition - Open for Entries

Welcome to the Grieve Writing Competition newsletter. If you have entered a story or poem or intend to submit, this newsletter is designed to provide some connection and community to your experience. We hope to bring you some comments and feedback from the judges, past finalists and those who work in the field of grief and loss. Share this newsletter with someone you know even if they do not feel ready to write. Perhaps they would like to read and hear from others.

The Competition: Hunter Writers Centre invites any Australian (including those living overseas) to enter a short work on the subject of grief. Your story should be 500 words or less, poems up to 36 lines. More than \$5000 in prizes will be awarded and over 100 pieces published in the 2016 anthology. For details about entering the competition, the live reading and the published anthology see our website.

Grieve Writing Judge Doris Zagdanski

“The Grieve Project allows people to ‘tell it like it is’,” said Doris Zagdanski, general manager of InvoCare Funeral Services and one of the judges of the 2016 Grieve writing competition.

“Last year, I loved everything I read,” she said. “I loved the honesty, I loved the perspective, how writers say it how they feel it. I think when we write, we’re able to say it without censoring it.”

Like many people, Doris stumbled into her career as a grief counsellor and funeral manager due to a twist of fate. In her 20s, she lost an infant daughter to SIDS. It was a terrible time in her life especially because she was so young.

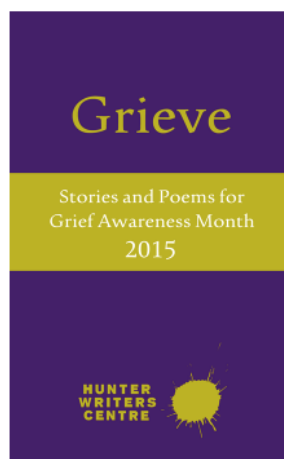
“I knew nothing about grief. Nobody in my family had died,” she said. “It was such a struggle to know how to cope, to know what to do. I worked it out after a few years searching for information. And I found it really helpful to start writing.”

Doris had never kept a journal, never written seriously or thought of herself as a writer. She found the experience of writing to be cathartic, a way to express feelings that she couldn’t discuss with friends or family.

“But I kept it a secret,” she said. “I thought people would think I’m crazy. I only did it for a couple of months, but when I looked back at my words later I thought was it really that bad?”

Since then, Doris has become a nationally-recognised grief educator and leader in the funeral industry. She’s written seven books on grief, including books for children, teenagers and people who’ve lost pets. This year she launched a new website, My Grieve Assist, to provide resources to the bereaved. “People need to know there is no “right” or “wrong” way to feel when coping with the death of someone they love”, she said.

“When people read somebody else’s story, they think ‘I’ve been there too’,” she said. “It’s so therapeutic to write. Writing for the Grieve Writing Competition can be therapy.”



2014, 2015 Anthologies available for sale

Paperback copies of the 2014 and 2015 Grieve anthologies are still available from our online shop.

These are a terrific resource if you’re a writer and want to read the stories and poems selected by judges in the past. eBook editions are also available from a variety of sellers including Smashwords, Barnes & Noble and Scribd. [Click here](#)

What about a gift? The Grieve books are a thoughtful gift for someone who has suffered a loss. A copy of Grieve with a note saying “Thinking of you” can let them know you care.

Stuck for Words

Doris Zagdanski BA Dip ED

What to say to someone who is grieving – Your guide to the Do's and Don'ts.

DO say something to acknowledge the loss. Friends may disappoint and add to the grief when they don't know how to make an approach. Avoidance, even if well intended, often hurts.

DO say their name. Whispering the name of the person who's died or completely leaving it out of the conversation is another type of avoidance.

DON'T try to say something to minimise the loss. You don't have to fix it by saying something that you think will cheer them up. Don't change the subject to 'get their mind off it'.

DO ask how things are going. A word of caution though, if you ask a grieving person, "How are you?", they might reply "Fine thanks" out of habit. Or they might not be sure you really are asking how they are coping. Try asking this:

"How are things at home these days?"

"How are you managing on your own?"

"It's been a month since the funeral, how are things going?"

DO let them cry. Try not to let your embarrassment or awkwardness stop their tears.

DON'T tell them to suppress their guilt or anger. Being angry, guilty or feeling responsible in some way are a common part of grief. We don't need to snap them out of it or tell them to stop thinking this way. It's best to let them share these feelings and show you understand.

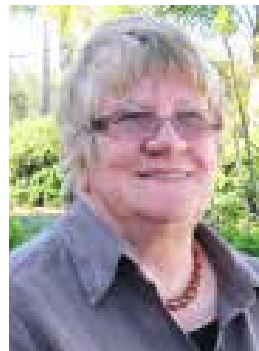
DO let them ask WHY? Grieving involves a search for meaning and answers. Your role is to allow the questions to surface. You don't need to have a logical answer or reply "It's God's will". Answers will eventually surface – even if the answer is "there is no answer".

DO remember them on significant days like Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries and family celebrations. It can be very hard to put on a happy face when everyone else is celebrating and you're feeling sad and lonely

because someone in your life is missing.

DON'T avoid grieving people because you think there's nothing you can offer to help them. You can help with the squeeze of the hand or an arm around their shoulder. You can help by showing them that it's alright to talk to you if they want to.

Doris Zagdanski is a leading figure in modern day grief and loss education. Her seminars are included in vocational qualifications in Allied Health, Counselling and Funeral Directing. This Factsheet is adapted from Doris' book *Stuck for Words* and is available at www.allaboutgrief.com



From the
Manager
NALAG Centre for
Loss & Grief

Trudy Hanson OAM

Grief Counsellor & Educator

Manager, NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief, Dubbo

Welcome to this issue of the Bereavement Buddy. Children are often the "Forgotten Mourners" when someone has died or there is a significant change in their life such as separation or even a change of school.

Often we are under the false assumption that children do not grieve and are therefore left out of the picture in receiving support and help.

This great article produced by the South Australian Government is most insightful and has some great tips for talking and supporting children who are grieving.

Grandpa's Hat is a helpful book written by Journalist Jen Cowley of her experience as a child grieving the death of her grandfather. Jen has worked closely with NALAG to produce this book for NALAG as a fundraiser. NALAG

receives all the profit from the sale for this book and to date we have sold over 1000 copies. We are now in our 2nd print run. To purchase your copy you can call into the NALAG Centre in Dubbo or purchase directly from our website.

The Centre is getting a much needed make over at the moment. We have replaced some gardens with turf and redeveloped our front garden with seating. A few photos of the work that is progressing.

Unbelievably we are almost at the end of another financial year and that means that membership fees are now due. Members will receive an invoice with this issue of the Bereavement Buddy.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your generous support in the past. Your Membership fees assist NALAG's continued support of the community by wonderful dedicated volunteers.

Regards

Trudy



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National Association for Loss & Grief (NSW) Inc

For Your Diary

Education & Training

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

Loss & Grief First Aid 1 Day Workshop

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.

Blue Healers Depression, Stress and Anxiety Program - 8 Week Program

Dubbo - Wednesday Nights Starting 27th July at 6.00pm

The Blue Healers Program assists people who are experiencing depression, anxiety and stress by teaching participants coping strategies to enhance wellbeing.

Blue Healers is a group program developed and presented by the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo. The program is presented by trained facilitators and supervised by a psychologist. The Blue Healers Program is offered FREE of charge to suitable participants. A light supper will be provided.

Seasons for Growth Companion Training - Children and Young People's Program

2 Day Workshop

DUBBO - Friday 26th August and Saturday 27th August 2016

Seasons for Growth is an innovative education program for children and young people in Primary and Secondary schools which explores the effects of change, loss and grief.

Facilitated by trained Companions within small 'peer' groups, the participants explore feelings, memories, loss and grief in a safe and creative way.

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.

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

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!**