

feel good and help you to refocus.

- Reconnect with old friends and family.
- Let others learn from you and laugh with you. Many people love to hear family history and anecdotes from an older person's life experience.
- Ask someone to be with you when facing new or stressful situations.
- Try to make meals easy, regular, nutritious and interesting. Nutrition plays a large part in our emotional health.
- Find enjoyable ways of exercising and being active. Gentle exercise, play, laughter, fun and games can reduce depression and improve emotional well being.
- Make a list of things in your life that give you joy. Choose to do something on the list soon.
- Find a counsellor or ring a help line.
- Find a GP you can talk to and who suits your needs.
- Seek out people and places that make you feel good and help you to refocus.

## Contact Us

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### Telephone Grief Support Line

**Call 02 9489 6644\*** (\*Call costs will apply)

### NALAG Centres & Branches (NSW)

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# Loss and Grief in Later Life

## Loss and Grief in Later Life

Life involves constant change. Sometimes change brings loss. Grief is the reaction to loss. How people react to loss may depend on: how they see the loss affecting their lives and those around them; past experience of loss and how they dealt with it; the way in which loss was acknowledged by the community; and the quality and availability of support and understanding. There is no set recipe for dealing with grief. However, understanding how others have experienced grief has helped many people to find their own way of dealing with their pain.

Loss and grief in later life can be trivialised by our society. A society that values youth and physical prowess may not comprehend the enormity of the grief that losses in later life can bring. The pain is often hidden for fear of ridicule, not wishing to cause trouble for carers, or fear of being judged as weak or silly by those around them. When the sorrow and grief is not acknowledged, it becomes even more difficult to face the reality of their new world. The pain is pushed down and there is a greater chance for anxiety, confusion and repression to develop, as energy goes into putting on a brave face or avoiding people and places. Recent loss can trigger the pain of old losses.

Losses in later life can be large or small, but often have an accumulative effect, affecting the way we live, our bodies, the way we see ourselves, our relationships and our place in the world. Physical changes can affect how we view

our attractiveness, our ability to take control of our environment, our energy to do things and our sexual and affection needs. Changes to how we live can affect our status and role in society, our sense of usefulness, financial independence, freedom of movement, choice of companions, our recreation and intellectual pursuits. As we age we experience many changes to our circle of close friends and family. Loss of people from our lives challenges us in our role in the family and our world, our sense of belonging, of who truly loves us and who is important to us. The following are examples of losses experienced in later life.

### Loss and our bodies

Changes involving: our appearance, weight, skin, hair, muscles, bones, bladder, energy, fitness, agility, mobility, sexual attractiveness & desire, hearing, sight, taste, memory, mental health, general health, chance of surgery, chronic or life threatening illness.

### Loss and how we live

Changes involving: financial independence, status, employment, retirement, property, driver's licence, possessions, a place to live, roles in the family and community, sport and recreation, privacy, safety, nutrition, transport, companionship.

### Loss and relationships with others

Changes involving: retirement, leaving the family home, death or separation from those we love, role in the family.

## Hints For Friends and Family

- Allow the grieving person to express feelings without trying to give advice or judge the importance of the loss.
- Listen! Being there and letting the person talk is a wonderful gift.
- Try not to take their reactions to the loss personally.
- Include them in discussions and decisions regarding ways of dealing with a loss and rituals surrounding the loss.
- Include the person where possible in celebrations and community activities.
- Acknowledge their resilience and wisdom in dealing with past losses.
- Be clear about what your needs are.

## Hints For Self Help

- Acknowledge your grief, give yourself time and space to feel and remember.
- Tell your story - talk, write, email friends draw, paint, record a video your story.
- Keep a journal or diary. Writing your thoughts and feelings in a letter you don't post can be very helpful in expressing frustration and anger. Sometimes these letters are to people. Celebrate and mourn important relationships and events in your life. For some it is not until later life they feel ready to openly grieve or take part in a ritual to mark the significance of the loss.
- Seek out people and places that make you