

Helping someone who is grieving

Be a good listener

Grieving people need to talk about their loss, acknowledge that they have been through a difficult experience. You can't fix their grief but you can be there, hear their story, and share their journey.

Be a shoulder to cry on

Allow them to cry with you, crying helps the release of emotions and this helps with healing.

Be in touch with them

Drop in, call on the telephone and say "I was thinking of you today" write a letter, send an email, remember special days like Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries.

When someone has experienced a loss, there will be big and small adjustments to be made in their lives. These could bring uncertainty, frustration, fear, sadness and change as each new day comes along. Grief is about adapting to change in life, thoughts, hopes, beliefs and the future.

Be a friend

Often being there is all that is needed to support someone who is grieving.

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(Adapted from the writings of Doris Zagdanski)

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Telephone Grief Support Line

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

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Aged Care

Coping with Loss and Grief in
the Aged Care Industry

What is Grief?

When someone we have been close to dies we can feel sad, angry, relieved, stressed, tired, confused, and guilty. Grief can cause confusion and anxiety, arousing many conflicting and bewildering emotions. It can leave you feeling aching and exhausted, with doubts about your ability to cope at work, or even at home.

Feelings of grief are different for everyone. These feelings have no set time limits and are a normal reaction to loss.

Unresolved grief may result in withdrawing from close or meaningful involvement with other residents, clients or colleagues. It may also contribute to long-term difficulties in a close relationship at home, inappropriate ways of dealing with things, depression, and even serious physical illness.

Working with the Aged

Caring for older people in their own home or residential aged care facilities brings aged care workers into very personal contact with them.

The implications for nurses, cleaners, doctors, office staff, carers, volunteers, chaplains, cooks, physiotherapists, diversional therapists, students providing community care or involved in work experience and other occupational groups in the aged care industry alike are profound.

Working with the aged, brings enormous rewards:

- Caring for people adding quality to their lives.
- Sharing their pasts.
- Being a valuable part of their present.

With caring comes the pain of loss.

Sometimes grieving at work can be difficult. Be aware of fellow workers and how they are responding, try to remain professional and try to be positive for the sake of other residents or clients.

What to Do? What to Say? When Someone is dying

- Allow them to raise all their fears.
- Answer their questions honestly.
- Be supportive of their beliefs and concerns.
- If you feel out of your depth, get someone else.

To relatives and loved ones

- Acknowledge their grief.
- Share your emotions, it's OK to cry.
- Talk about the person who died (within the limits of confidentiality).
- Answer all questions honestly.

To other residents

- Tell them directly and with caring.
- Stay with them to let them respond.
- Be accepting of all responses.
- Involve them in things like signing cards for relatives, or memorial services.

No one ever complained that someone cried; but they have complained that no one seemed to care.

What might help?

- Write a memorial paragraph for a newsletter or a memory book.
- Learn relaxation and other stress management skills.
- If approved by your supervisor, ask family if you may attend the funeral.
- Talk about it to a supervisor or colleague.

- Seek support from a professional counsellor.
- Take time out for yourself.
- Take time to exercise.

Ideas for Your Workplace

- Hold memorial services for staff, residents, family and friends.
- Set up grief boxes filled with sympathy cards, relaxation tapes, literature and photos.
- Have formal debriefings with all staff, volunteers and others involved in their care. Finish it with social time such as tea or drinks.
- Organise workplace exercise or tai chi classes.
- Make sure off-duty staff and volunteers that were close to the person who died are called at home.
- Make sure students providing community care or involved in work experience that were close to the person who died are advised via the school contact person.
- Set up a book of memories or a memorial column in your newsletter.
- Involve staff and volunteers from all occupational groups in team meetings and social events.
- Survey staff to identify what they need.

Further Information

Your workplace should have a copy of 'Managing loss and grief in the aged care industry'. It has a section for employees and volunteers to read and lists of resources and contacts for the management of loss and grief.

Adapted from the Workcover NSW publication "Managing loss & grief in the aged care industry".