



The Rosemary Branch

Summer 2013



“ One of the greatest gifts you can give someone who is grieving is time and the ability to listen ”

Jenny Field, Senior Bereavement Counsellor,
Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement



How to Help Someone Who is Grieving

Grief is a personal, lonely experience, but we can walk alongside the bereaved on their journey.

It is an unavoidable reality that we will all be touched by grief at some point in our lives. When bereavement does occur, the love and support of family and friends is essential to navigate the grieving experience. “No one can take away the pain and sadness felt by the bereaved,” says Jenny Field, Senior Bereavement Counsellor at the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, “but having the care and support of family and friends can be comforting and healing, reducing the sense of isolation one can experience.”

Understanding how people grieve

Grieving is a uniquely individual experience. Some may grieve openly, whereas others may grieve in a more private, less visible way.

Some need people around them, while others may need space.

Many things influence how we grieve — for example, the relationship experienced, the age of the deceased, the circumstances of the death, life experience, available support, their beliefs and personality. As long as the bereaved person is not causing harm to themselves or others, then there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ ways to grieve. Try to understand and accept the bereaved person’s style of grieving, as this will allow you to better support them.

Interacting with the bereaved

Watching someone’s grief can evoke a range of emotions and behaviours, from fear and avoidance, to compassion and wanting to help. One thing that people often find hard to accept is that you cannot ‘fix’ things for them. What you can do, however, is walk beside them on their journey. “One of the

greatest gifts you can give someone who is grieving is time and the ability to listen without doing anything,” says Jenny. “Don’t underestimate the value of just being present”.

Suggestions for interacting with the bereaved

- Ask them how they are, both initially and on an ongoing basis.
- Use their loved one’s name when speaking with them.
- Show them that you care — a hug may be helpful.
- Don’t avoid them. While there are no words that can heal their pain, to hear no words is far worse.
- Be prepared to listen to and accept strong emotions.
- Avoid using platitudes such as ‘they had a good innings’ or ‘it’s God’s will’.

- Offer to spend time with them, but don't commit to or suggest support that you are unable to follow through on.
- Don't say things like 'I know' or 'I understand' unless you really do; alternative responses may be 'I can't even imagine what you are going through', or 'it must be so hard for you'.
- Share your memories and stories of their loved one.
- Don't take their responses personally — grief is an emotional rollercoaster, and the reactions of the bereaved are not a personal attack on you.
- If you think you have said the wrong thing, don't be afraid to apologise. There is nothing wrong with saying 'I shouldn't have said that' or 'I don't know what to say' — at least then they know that you are trying.

Practical support

Another way of acknowledging someone's loss and helping to support them is through actions, for example, by attending the funeral, sending a card or flowers, calling, dropping by or sending a text. It may not be immediately obvious, but even brief contact is often appreciated and remembered. Practical support such as child minding, walking the dog, mowing the lawn or providing a meal can also be a great help, especially immediately after the loss.

Support in the long term

Below are some suggestions around how you can support someone who is grieving beyond the first few months.

- Be patient. Grief doesn't have a timeline and may take years to work through.
- If you are an employer, try to be as compassionate and flexible as you can.
- Remember and acknowledge anniversaries and dates of significance for the bereaved person.
- Keep in touch and don't be afraid to ask them out socially — they may not be ready straight away, but when they are this will give them the opportunity.

- Encourage them to accept help and support along the way where needed.
- Ask them what they need, and how you can help.

Looking after yourself

It is all too easy to overlook our own wellbeing when supporting someone who is grieving. Self-care is important, both physically e.g. getting enough sleep, nutrition and exercise, and emotionally e.g. making sure you aren't inhibiting your own capacity to grieve, whether it be for the person who has

died, or for your own experiences of loss that may come back to the surface.

Take a moment to consider what you are committing to, and what may limit your ability to follow through. "You need to be fair to both yourself and the person who needs support." says Jenny.

For more information on grief resources and support services, please contact the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement on (03) 9265 2100 or go to www.grief.org.au



Common Questions Around Supporting the Bereaved



A colleague of mine from work was recently bereaved. Will it be easier for them if I pretend nothing is wrong when they come back to work?

Returning to work can be difficult for someone who is recently bereaved. Often people think that if they pretend everything is 'normal' it will make it easier for their colleague, however this is not necessarily the case. When they return, acknowledge their loss and let them know that you are there for them if they need anything. Don't press them for details unless they want to disclose them, and try to keep the initial conversation relatively brief



What do I write in a sympathy card?

It is often difficult to know what to say when writing a card to someone who has experienced a loss. In general, it is

best to keep your message simple and honest. If you are unsure of what to say, simply let them know how sorry you are to hear of their loss and that you are thinking of them.



My father passed away recently. Mum doesn't seem to be coping very well — should I make her see a counsellor?

Deciding to see a counsellor is up to the individual, you might like to suggest it as an option, but you can't force someone to do something they don't want to do, or aren't ready for. Keep in mind that your mother isn't necessarily the same person she was before your father's death. Her life has changed completely, and what to you is 'not coping', more than likely is a completely normal grief reaction. So long as she is not harming herself, or those around her, try to accept her way of grieving, and offer support where you can.

Letter from the Director



Welcome to the Summer edition of *The Rosemary Branch* and our first issue for 2013. I hope you had a safe holiday season, and that you were kind to yourself at a time when grief can be so overwhelming.

In this edition, our feature article looks at how to help someone who is grieving. After a death, people are often unsure of what to say, what to do and how to help the bereaved. Fearful of doing the wrong thing, they may mistakenly conclude that it is better to stay away, or act like nothing has changed. Good support from family, friends and even work colleagues, however, can make a big difference in the lives of those who have lost a loved one.

We hope that this issue of *The Rosemary Branch* may be useful to those who are looking for ways to better support someone who is bereaved, but also for those who are grieving and would like those around them to better understand how they can help.

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Yours sincerely,

Chris Hall

Director, Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

In this edition:

- Feature article: [How to Help Someone who is Grieving](#)
- [ACGB Support Group: Death of a Parent](#)
- Two new Your Stories contributions
- [Featured grief resources](#)

ACGB support groups

Support groups are a way of bringing people together in a safe space to share common life experiences. This column looks at the range of bereavement support groups offered by the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, and how you might become involved.



Death of a Parent

Death of a Parent is a support group for adults who have experienced the loss of one or both of their parents.

Any child, no matter what age they find themselves, who experiences the death of a parent will find their life forever altered. "A parent's death often leaves adult children with a sense of abandonment and even panic that shocks them and leaves them feeling bewildered and lost", says group facilitator, Michal deWilloughby. "In addition to this, when an adult child loses one or both parents, especially if they are elderly, they often find their grief disenfranchised, even silenced, because it is seen as a 'natural' and 'normal' part of life's plan, and therefore somehow less significant".

With appropriate support, however, and the space to grieve, losing one's parent(s) can allow the freedom

and potential to become closer to one's truest, most authentic self. "Eventually, many adult children are able to include the more affirming and constructive aspects of their parent(s) into their lives, which can be a catalyst for great transformational growth." says Michal. "The *Death of a Parent* support group offers participants an opportunity to explore these concepts, and connect with others who share a similar experience."

Death of a Parent meets on the second Tuesday of each month in Clayton.



To register your interest, or for further information about the *Death of a Parent* support group (or other ACGB support groups) call 03 9265 2100 or email support@grief.org.au

“A parent's death often leaves adult children with a sense of abandonment and even panic that shocks them and leaves them feeling bewildered and lost”

— Michal deWilloughby
Group Facilitator



Your Stories

Love is Stronger Than a Death

By Cameron Kent

Around this time last year I wrote an article for *The Rosemary Branch* about my Mother's death. I called it 'My Journey'.

In that article I recalled my experience of bereavement and the way I processed my Mother's passing. One year on I think the time is right to write another article about where I am in this process now. I hope by doing this it might be of assistance to other people who are going through the early phases of their own grieving experiences.

There's no doubt about it: a bereavement is a really tough thing to go through. It's even harder to work through. There is no school to prepare you for the very great shock it brings to your life. A death is forced learning, not the learning you want or the learning you might choose.

To work your way through a bereavement you will need to have friends to support you along the way. It's no easy thing to navigate. And remember this: if you find yourself struggling to find your way through the maze that is bereavement, be sure to ask for help, because it's okay to admit you're not coping.

A death brings different reactions from the people around you and this adds to the complexity of the experience. Some people are really helpful, some people only helpful to a point and some people have no idea about what to say or do. I've noticed from my own experience that it's not uncommon for bereaved people to feel they are under pressure to "get over it" — as if it were that easy. Don't feel you have to say "I'm over it" before you genuinely are because it can be counterproductive to hurry things along. Take your time. It's okay to grieve.

Well meaning people used to ask me this question quite a lot — are you okay? — and I understand they felt the need to ask me this, but the words never really seemed to me to respectfully catch the occasion. I felt I was being encouraged to hurry my grieving along and that feeling never really sat comfortably with me. I would say 'yes' because I felt I was expected to say that when the truth was I wasn't fine at all. With time I realised the answer to this question was a whole lot more complex than simply

saying yes, so I would say "I agree with the saying that you never really get over a death but you learn to live with it — and that's where I am these days". It felt a whole lot better to say this.

I have also been struck by the great power 'Love' plays in our lives and the role it plays in working through a death. The truth is we only want the very best for the people we love, and have loved, and somehow this concept doesn't sit comfortably with the reality that someone has died. So, there's a tendency in the early stages of a bereavement to see a death as love lost whereas these days I see it more as a new chapter in a continuing love story.

Love is multi-dimensional. It's not just a matter of our love for the person who has died but their love for us as well. Love is the growth component of a relationship, and much, much more. It's also the factor that energises growth.

Love is stronger than a death and love can withstand a death. The trick is to find ways to keep your love alive. By grieving my Mother's death in the way I did and by allowing the process to run its course I allowed my love for her to inform my grieving — the same way that love now informs my return to good health. I have gone through the full range of feelings and emotions over the last four years: from feeling great sadness to feeling my Mother's love coming my way each and every day. For me the feeling is very agreeable, to know that our relationship is strong, and very much alive and well.

Just be sure to let your grieving process run its course.

The Grief Iceberg

By Mim Markovic

If I let my shadow self take over
I would collapse in a messy jelly 'n' bone heap
on the floor like some
discarded, tasteless stew.

I would not shower or dress or put on my happy face
(so the world could see the real me and not just my personae)
the sheets on my bed would trap my greasy grief and soften
and smell of the sweat of my sadness and "I just can't be arsed"
sentiment.

One inane, seductively-escapist, crap TV show would blur
into the next causing a brain-drain fug and I would slowly
mutilate my once fertile mind.
My psyche would weep for the spiritual emptiness
in my world and existential angst overtaking my soul.

I would tell Carl Jung
that he can shove his
anima up his animus
(and laugh at the image).

Through this journey of bereavement
the tip of my iceberg continues to glisten and
stand erect showing the world that I am
strong, competent and resilient

(while the sharks and killer whales gnaw and nibble
away beneath).

Your Stories is now online!

Want to share your experience of grief with others? Want to read about other people's grief journey? To learn more about how you can contribute, or to read other people's contributions go to www.grief.org.au and click on **Your Stories**.

Join with the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement and help transform the lives of grieving people.



The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement relies heavily on donations for the provision of our services. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible and help support a range

of support services including bereavement counselling, support groups, newsletters, events, education and training.

How to make a donation

1. Fill in this donation slip and return to ACGB via post
2. Visit www.grief.org.au and click 'Make a donation'
3. Call us on 1800 642 066

One off donation

Here is my gift of: \$25 \$50 \$100 \$200
 Other \$ _____ (min \$2)

My cheque / money order payable to the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement is enclosed or, please debit my:

Mastercard Visa

Signature _____ Expiry ____ / ____

Regular contribution

I will make a regular gift of \$ _____ (min \$10)

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 Every 6 months Every 12 months

Contact details*

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Please send me information about including a gift in my Will to the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

Thank you

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ABN: 22 038 903 478 www.grief.org.au

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Featured Resources

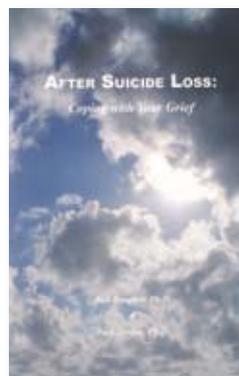


Helping Teens Cope with Death

The Dougy Centre
\$22.95

This practical guide covers the unique grief responses of teenagers and the specific challenges they face when grieving a death. You will learn how death impacts teenagers and ways that you can help them. The book also offers advice from parents and

caregivers of bereaved teens on how to support adolescents and how to determine when professional help is needed.

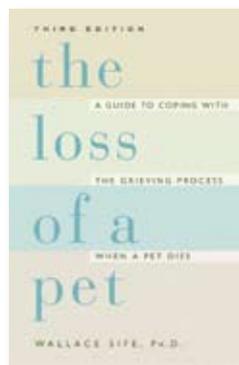


After Suicide Loss: Coping With Your Grief

Bob Baugher & Jack Jordan
\$13.50

A 65-page book for people whose loved one has died from suicide. It is a gentle guide through events and reactions that often occur during the first year and beyond following suicide. Additional features include ten personal stories written by people whose loved one died

from suicide, suggested readings, and suggestions for deciding whether to seek professional help.



The Loss of a Pet: A Guide to Coping With the Grieving Process When a Pet Dies

Wallace Sife
\$19.95

This sensitive and practical guide to the specific struggles of pet loss, is written by Wallace Sife, founder of the US-based Association for Pet Loss. Sife addresses the particular challenges of pet bereavement, which are largely

misunderstood and even ridiculed in society. He explores the human-animal bond to explain why the loss of the bond can be so devastating, and provides genuinely useful information on coping with the loss of your beloved companion. This book is suitable not only for people experiencing pet loss, but also for professionals working in the counselling, bereavement or veterinary fields.

These books, along with a range of other useful resources, can be purchased from the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement.

Visit www.grief.org.au/resources to download a resource guide/order form, or call 1800 642 066.

CUT ALONG THIS DOTTED LINE





Our Services

The Rosemary Branch

For all enquiries about *The Rosemary Branch*, please contact the Centre on 03 9265 2100 or email newsletters@grief.org.au to subscribe to our mailing list. To download a PDF version of current and past editions, or to receive *The Rosemary Branch* as an e-newsletter go to www.grief.org.au

Bereavement Counselling and Support Service

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB) operates a statewide Specialist Bereavement Counselling and Support Service for Victoria. This program is funded by the Victorian Government Department of Health and has counsellors located across metropolitan Melbourne, in regional areas (Grampians, Gippsland, Hume, Barwon South-West, and Loddon Mallee), and in areas affected by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires. For further information, call 03 9265 2100, or email counselling@grief.org.au

Support Groups

ACGB operates a range of support groups, including groups for adults, children, bereaved partners, death of a parent and many more. For further information call 03 9265 2100, or email support@grief.org.au

Lending Library

The Lending Library is a portable collection of books about grief and loss. The books cover a wide range of topics and cater for all age groups. For more information, please contact the Centre on 03 9265 2100 or email counselling@grief.org.au

Volunteering

Would you like to contribute to the work of the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement as a volunteer? Contact us on 03 9265 2100, or email info@grief.org.au

Ceremony of Remembrance

The Ceremony of Remembrance is held once each year. Information is sent to current and previous clients of the Centre who are on our mailing list prior to the event. For further information call 03 9265 2100, or email counselling@grief.org.au

Better Health Channel



ACGB is a content partner with the Better Health Channel. Better Health Channel provides health and medical information that is quality assured, reliable, up to date, easy to understand, regularly reviewed and locally relevant. For more information, go to www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Healthshare



Healthshare is an Australian national health initiative designed to provide better access to health expertise and improve the quality of health information online. ACGB is a content provider within Healthshare's online bereavement support community. Users can post questions or share experiences with others. ACGB staff regularly answer questions posted by the community. For more information, go to www.healthshare.com.au

We value your feedback

If you have feedback about *The Rosemary Branch*, the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Counselling and Support Service, or any of the services we deliver, we would love to hear from you. Contact us on 03 9265 2100 or email info@grief.org.au

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