

by Jess Sanders with art by Stephanie Spartels

# What is Grief?



A book to support children through grief  
and loss, and help them build resilience





Developed by:



Delivered by:



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The program is developed by Palliative Care Tasmania and funded by the Tasmanian State Government. The program was co-designed in collaboration with key stakeholders in the youth, education and mental health sectors and young people with lived experience. It is delivered in the Murray PHN region and supported by funding from Murray PHN through the Australian Government's PHN Program. Murray PHN and Palliative Care Tasmania appreciate the collaboration with the Victorian Paediatric Palliative Care Program and Palliative Care Victoria in this initiative.

[www.learningthroughloss.org.au](http://www.learningthroughloss.org.au)

Cover and internal design by Stephan Spartels

For support and resources, visit <https://bit.ly/42lv587> or use the QR code.



# What is Grief?








## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book has been written to support young people in understanding their grief and to provide them with the resilience-building tools to support them on their grieving journey. The core message of this book is that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Children need permission from the adults around them to grieve in the ways that feel right for them. You can use this book to open up conversations with children about what their grief looks and feels like. There are discussion questions in the back of this book to help you in doing this.

Some things to keep in mind when a young person shares their feelings with you:

- Resist the temptation to 'fix' their feelings or talk about 'the positives'.
- Tell them how glad you are that they told you about what they are feeling.
- Remain curious and open.
- Remind young people that they are not alone in how they are feeling.
- If a child does not have a trusted adult to continue these conversations with, ensure they are connected to services that will continue to support them. If you are not aware of local support, there is a list of national support lines in the back of this book and an extended list of services available at [www.learningthroughloss.org.au/support/](http://www.learningthroughloss.org.au/support/)



*LEARNING THROUGH LOSS would like to acknowledge and express deep gratitude towards the young people who shared their lived experiences of grief and loss with us. Their insights and reflections directly shaped the program and continue to inspire and inform its development today.*

Dear Reader,

There is no right or wrong way to grieve – everyone's grieving journey is different. Grief is a part of life, and everyone will lose something or someone important to them at some point in their life. Know that you are never alone in your grief.

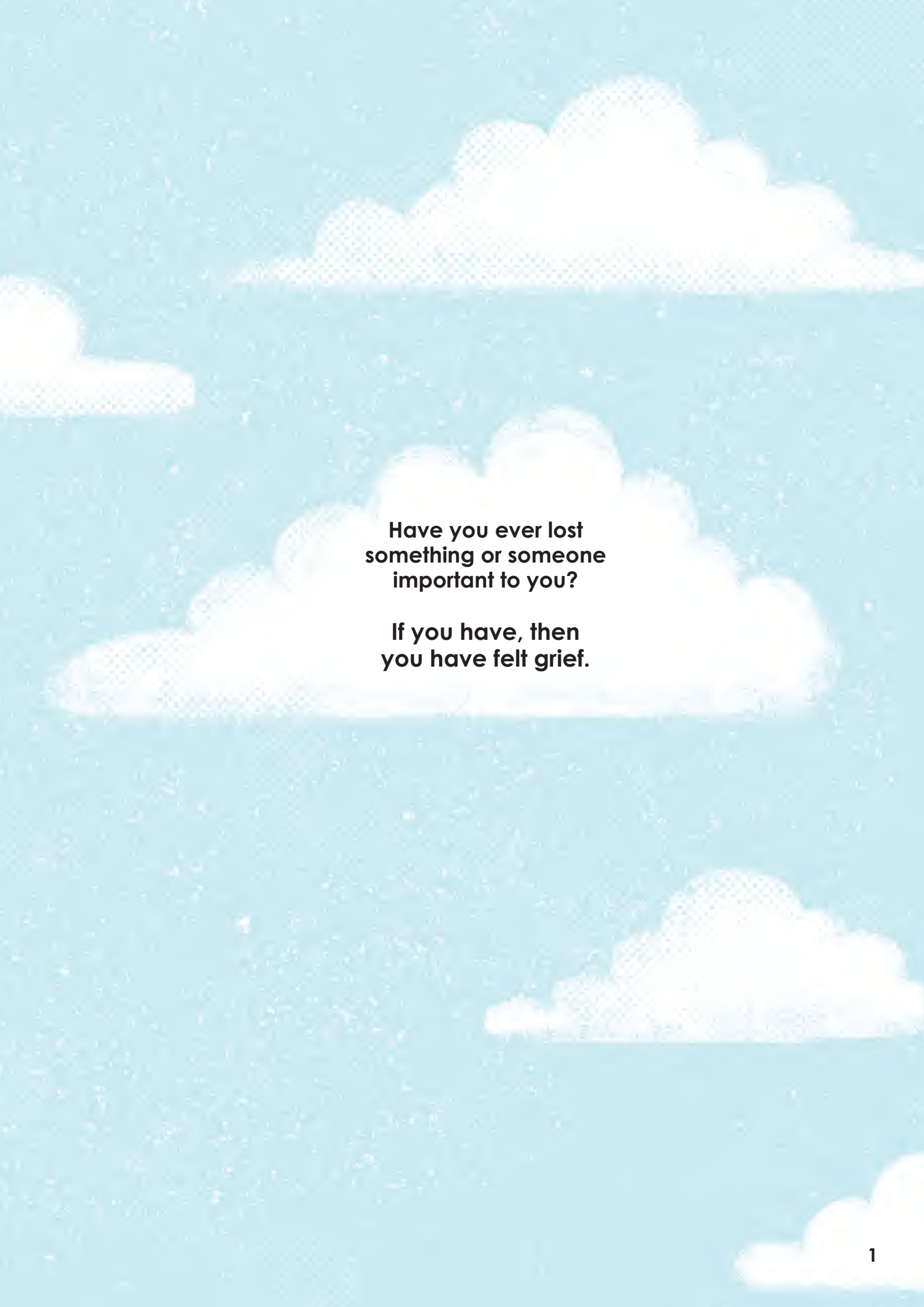
There might be times when your grief feels so big and so heavy that you don't know how you will carry it. I promise you that this feeling won't last forever. With the support of the adults you trust, you are strong enough and brave enough to carry your grief through life's ups and downs.

Your friend,

*Jess*







**Have you ever lost  
something or someone  
important to you?**

**If you have, then  
you have felt grief.**



**Grief is what we feel when we lose something or someone important to us.**





**And grieving is the journey  
that we go on after our loss.**





**Grieving is a part of being human.  
Everyone grieves, even grown-ups.**

**You can grieve a person when  
they die or move away.**





**You can grieve  
a friendship or  
a place.**



**And you can  
grieve the loss of  
your home or what  
your family used  
to look like.**





**You can grieve a toy  
you lost or your pet  
that died.**





**You can grieve a future that  
you imagined would look a  
certain kind of way.**

**And you can grieve the fun  
you used to have with someone  
or the conversations you used  
to share.**





During your grieving journey, you will feel many different emotions.

You might feel:

angry,



sad,



hopeless,



guilty,



confused,



happy,



jealous,



worried,  
or scared.



Sometimes you can  
feel lots of different  
emotions all at once.



**Your grieving journey can start before your loss.**

**You might start to grieve someone you love when you learn that they are sick and going to die.**

**Or you might start to grieve your home before you move away.**









Grief is different for everyone and there is no right or wrong way to grieve.







**Your grieving journey might feel like a rollercoaster with highs and lows, and twists and turns that take you by surprise.**

**Your grief might feel like the ocean.  
Wild and angry one moment,**





calm and still the next. Just like the weather,  
we can't control our emotions. All we can do  
is feel them as they come.





**Sometimes grief can feel like a heavy backpack that you struggle to carry each day. It might feel hard to do simple activities like getting out of bed or brushing your teeth.**





**At other times grief can feel smaller. You can feel that the backpack is there, but it doesn't stop you from having fun. Finding joy and enjoying life is a part of grieving too.**

**Some grief never goes away  
completely. And that's okay.**







**Over time, you will learn how to carry your grief backpack, weather the storms and ride the ups and downs of the grief roller coaster.**

**There are things you can do to care for yourself throughout your grief journey.**



**You can speak to yourself like you would your own best friend by saying things like 'It's okay to feel your feelings' or 'I'm proud of you.'**

**You can let yourself feel your waves of emotions in whatever way you need to.**





**You can put your grief into a painting, drawing or a letter to the person you have lost.**



**And you can do the things that you love, perhaps dancing, drawing, exploring or playing.**



**Grief can often make you feel alone. But you are never alone – everyone grieves, and grief is made to be shared. Talk to the adults you trust about how you are feeling and ask for help when you need it.**






**And always remember  
there is no wrong or right  
way to grieve. However  
you need to grieve is the  
right way for you.**







If you don't have someone to talk to, there are organisations that would love to support you. You can speak to people over the phone or on chat using the numbers and links below. All support lines are free.

#### **KIDS HELP LINE (24/7)**

Ages 5 to 25

Support any time, for any reason.

Phone: 1800 55 1800

Web chat: [www.kidshelpline.com.au/](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/)

#### **BEYOND BLUE (24/7)**

Ages 5+

Free mental health support.

Phone: 1300 22 4636

Web chat: [www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/talk-to-a-counsellor/chat](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/talk-to-a-counsellor/chat)

#### **QLIFE (3PM – MIDNIGHT)**

All ages

LGBTIQ+ peer lead support.

Phone: 1800 184 527

Web chat: [www.qlife.org.au/](http://www.qlife.org.au/)

#### **GRIEFLINE (8 AM – 8PM)**

Ages 15+

Grief support for anyone who needs it.

Phone: 1300 845 745

#### **LIFELINE (24/7)**

All ages

Crisis support.

Phone: 13 11 14

Web chat: [www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat/](http://www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat/)

For support and resources, visit  
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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## PAGES 2 – 3

- Who do you think the children on this page are grieving?

## PAGES 6 – 7

- Is there someone, or something that you are grieving right now?

## PAGES 8 – 9

- What emotions have you felt on your grieving journey?
- What emotion are you feeling right now?

## PAGES 16 – 17

- Does your grief look like a backpack, the ocean or a roller coaster?
- If not, what does your grief look like? Can you draw it?

## PAGES 20 – 21

- How do you care for yourself when you are feeling big feelings?
- Is there something creative you would like to do for the person, place or pet that you have lost?



## HAVE YOU EVER LOST SOMETHING OR SOMEONE IMPORTANT TO YOU?

*If you have, then you have felt grief,  
and you are not alone.*

WHAT IS GRIEF? Is a gentle guide for children who have experienced loss. Perhaps they have lost a parent, sibling or pet. Or maybe they are grieving how their family once looked. Whatever they are grieving, WHAT IS GRIEF? will support them to understand what they are feeling, and provide them with resilience-building tools for their grieving journey.

WHAT IS GRIEF? was written by social worker and award-winning author, Jess Sanders for the Learning Through Loss program. Learning Through Loss aims to create grief literate communities through evidence-based education and accessible resources. The program is developed by Palliative Care Tasmania and funded by the Tasmanian State Government.

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