

Supporting Young People Through Grief and Loss

a resource for
school staff



LEARNING THROUGH LOSS

Developed by:



Delivered by:



An Australian Government Initiative

Grief is a natural response to loss and an experience that everyone will go through. Grief doesn't only occur when you lose someone you care about, you can grieve a relationship, home, pet, job, or imagined future.

Starting a conversation with a young person about grief and loss can be intimidating. This resource captures a range of services, resources, tips, and strategies that will support you in starting the conversation and supporting a young person to build resilience in the face of grief and loss. Young people are often navigating grief for the first time, and they need safe people and safe places to explore their grief in order to heal and grow.

As an educator or general school staff member, you are not expected to act as a mental health professional. However, educators and school staff play an important role in supporting young people to navigate grief and loss.

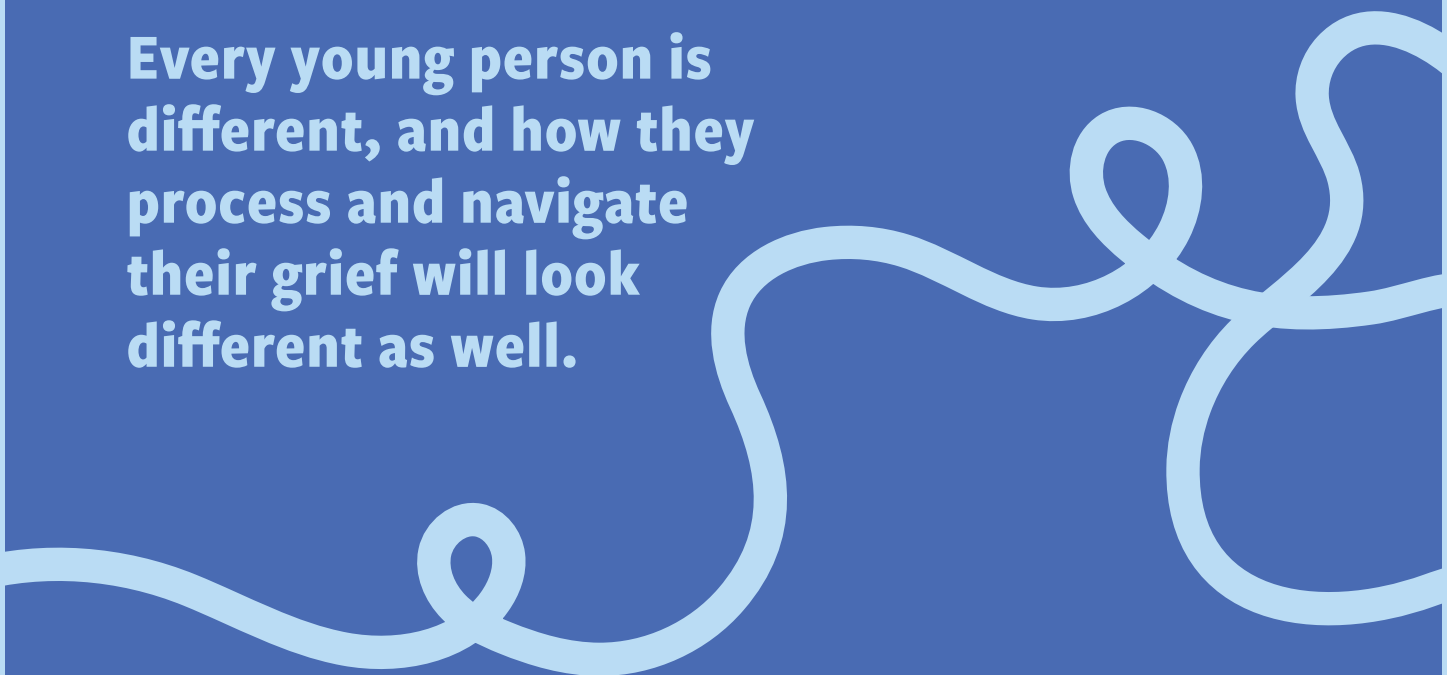
AS AN EDUCATOR, YOU CAN SUPPORT A YOUNG PERSON NAVIGATING GRIEF AND LOSS BY:

- Identifying the challenges experienced by a young person.
- Actively listening.
- Providing positive coping strategies.
- Checking in and monitoring a young person's behaviour and presentation.
- Referring to the school wellbeing team or wellbeing leader for clinical intervention and support.

IT'S TIME TO REFER TO YOUR WELLBEING OR LEADERSHIP TEAM WHEN:

- You are worried about the safety, wellbeing or mental health of a young person.
- You feel out of your depth and unable to meet the young person's needs.

Every young person is different, and how they process and navigate their grief will look different as well.



IF A YOUNG PERSON IS STRUGGLING WITH THEIR GRIEF THEY MAY:

- Isolate themselves from friends and family.
- Cry and express deep sadness.
- Have heightened emotional responses to situations such as, excessive anger, anxiety and apathy.
- Engage in risk-taking behaviour.
- Change their personality such as becoming more or less social.
- Become confused, disillusioned, or overwhelmed.
- Have trouble sleeping.

- Regress.
- Become very tired and distracted.
- Experience aches and pains or stomach aches.
- Worry about the future, their family, and friends.

GRIEF AND LOSS AFFECT A YOUNG PERSON'S ABILITY TO:

- Attend class or school.
- Hold concentration.
- Engage with their friends.
- Do their homework.
- Regulate their emotions.
- Sit still.

HOW TO SUPPORT A YOUNG PERSON NAVIGATING GRIEF AND LOSS:

1

RECOGNISE THEIR GRIEF BY SAYING:

- *'I'm so sorry for your loss.'*
- *'How are you doing today?'*
- *'Is it okay if I keep checking in on you and offering a space to talk?'*
- *'It's so great to have you back at school.'*
- *'I've been thinking of you.'*
- *'Words feel insignificant but I want you to know how sorry I am.'*

2

ACTIVELY LISTEN & VALIDATE THEIR EMOTIONS.

- Make sure the young person feels safe.
- Don't try to fix it (you cannot).
- Be calm, confident, and compassionate (don't make them feel like they have to manage your emotions or anxiety).

Phrases to show you are listening and that you understand:

'It sounds like you are feeling _____.'

'You're going through a lot right now.'

'You're feeling overwhelmed and misunderstood, is that right?'

Phrases to validate emotions & normalise grief:

'Big feelings are really normal in situations like these.'

'Whatever you are feeling is okay.'

'It's okay to have fun, and to smile, joy is a part of the grief process too.'

'Grief comes in waves and big feelings might come out of nowhere – if you need to take time out I'll help you to do so.'

'Grief looks different for everyone – there is no such thing as 'normal grief.'

3

UNDERSTAND THEIR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What does their support network look like at home?
- What do they need from their school and their teachers?
- What is their capacity right now? What do they feel they can do?
- What are their strengths? Can I work with their strengths to keep them encouraged and engaged?

APPROACHES TO USE:

- **PERSON-CENTRED** – appreciate that every young person is different and that their needs and circumstances will differ too. Where possible give young people a voice and options to choose from.
- **STRENGTHS-BASED** – focus on what a young person can do instead of what they cannot. Look for opportunities to complement and support their existing strengths and capacities.

4

LOOK BEYOND THEIR BEHAVIOUR.

The way in which a young person experiences and expresses grief will vary greatly. For some young people, their grief may take the form of anger, aggression, and other disruptive behaviours.

When a young person is acting in a way that is challenging, it's important to try and separate them from their behaviour and show compassion. This approach is called Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) and you can learn more about it by reading the article listed on page 7 of our resources.

5

CONNECT THEM TO SUPPORT SERVICES AND RESOURCES.

- Follow your school's referral pathways for mental health and grief support.
- Provide young people with options and don't pressure them into any one kind of support.
- Set realistic expectations with a young person regarding outcomes and wait times.
- Provide adolescents with a copy of the 'Navigating Through Grief and Loss' resource.

SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people should be referred in accordance with your school's policies and procedures.

Below is a list of additional resources a young person can access:

Support lines

KIDS HELPLINE

Phone support
1800 55 1800

Online support
[www.kidshelpline.com.au/
get-help/webchat-counselling](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/get-help/webchat-counselling)

BEYOND BLUE

Phone support
1300 22 4636

Online support
[www.beyondblue.org.au/
support-service/chat](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/support-service/chat)

STANDBY Support After Suicide

Phone support
1300 727 247

<https://standbysupport.com.au>

Counselling & psychology

HEADSPACE

AVAILABLE STATE-WIDE

Phone support
1800 650 890

Online support
[www.headspace.org.au/
online-and-phone-support/](http://www.headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support/)

Find a centre near you
[www.headspace.org.au/
headspace-centres](http://www.headspace.org.au/headspace-centres)

CANTEEN (Cancer Support)

1800 835 932
www.canteen.org.au

If a young person has cancer, or has a loved one who has cancer or has died from cancer they are able to access all of Canteen's resources and supports:

- Free and confidential counselling services are available 6 days a week.
- Access to grief programs where young people can learn about grief and how to cope with it as well as talk about their experiences with other young people who understand.
- Access to Canteen Connect which is a 24/7 online community where a young person can connect with other young people who understand what grief is like.

Early Intervention – mental health & wellbeing support

BETTER HEALTH CHANNEL

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE
AND MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICES

<https://bit.ly/4ldd8Xg>

The Better Health Channel has a fact sheet focused on providing information on mental health and children and young people at different ages. It includes helpful links to options for additional support and information.

REDKITE

1800 RED KITE
support@redkite.org.au

Redkite provides practical, emotional and financial support for families who have a child with cancer aged 18 or under, so you don't have to face it alone.

SUPPORT FOR YOUNG CARERS

YOUNG CARERS NETWORK

www.youngcarersnetwork.com.au

The Young Carers Network is a place for young carers across Australia to learn about support services, access resources and share their story and opinions.

THE YOUNG CARER BURSARY PROGRAM

[www.youngcarersnetwork.com.
au/young-carer-bursary](http://www.youngcarersnetwork.com.au/young-carer-bursary)

This program supports young carers to continue with their education. The program offers a limited number of bursaries each year. Young carers across Australia can apply from late July until early September.

SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS

It's not easy supporting a young person through grief and loss. Whilst you are a professional, you are also a person with your own mental health needs. You also bring your own experiences of grief and loss that might be triggered during the process of providing support. It is important that you know your boundaries, practise self-care and reach out for support. This is how you will sustainably be able to support others.

Support services:

Your GP can provide you with a mental-health care plan that allows you to receive 10 sessions with a mental health professional at a reduced rate each year.

The following support lines are free to access.

GRIEFLINE

Phone support
1300 845 745 | 8am to 8pm:
Mon-Fri (AEDT)

Support groups
griefline.org.au/get-help/support-groups

BEYOND BLUE

Phone support
1300 22 4636 | 24/7

web chat
www.beyondblue.org.au/support-service/chat

13 11 14 | 24/7

Web chat
www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat/

I300YARN

13 92 76
<https://www.i3yarn.org.au>

If you, or someone you know, are feeling worried or no good, you can connect with I3YARN and talk with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter

QLIFE

1800 184 527
<https://www.qlife.org.au/>

QLife provides free support to LGBTIQ+ people of all ages. They offer peer support and referral for people wanting to talk about a range of issues including sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings, or relationships.

RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING

Videos:

- Brene Brown on E
- Dr Lucy Hone's Ted Talk – 3 secrets of resilient people

Articles & reports:

- [Linking Unconditional Positive Regard and Teacher Wellbeing](#), an article by Berry Street
- [Being there: young people supporting their friends through tough times](#) a report by Batyr
- [Beyond Self-care: an Educator Wellbeing Guide](#) by Headspace & Beyond Blue

Books:

- *35 Ways to Help a Grieving Child*, by The Dougy Centre
- *Resilient Grieving*, by Dr Lucy Hone
- *Grief in Children, A Handbook for Adults*, by Alte Dyregrov, by Bill Yule
- *A Parent's Guide to Raising Grieving Children*, by Silverman and Kelly
- *I Just Want to be Me: Building Resilience in Young People* by Timothy Bowden Postgrad Dip Psych

Websites:

- Be You – Free resources and professional learning to support you in growing a mentally healthy generation. www.beyou.edu.au/
- What's Your Grief www.whatsyourgrief.com
- Palliative Care Victoria: www.pallcarevic.asn.au
- Grief Australia www.grief.org.au

App:

- My Grief



Developed by:



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www.learningthroughloss.org.au



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



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