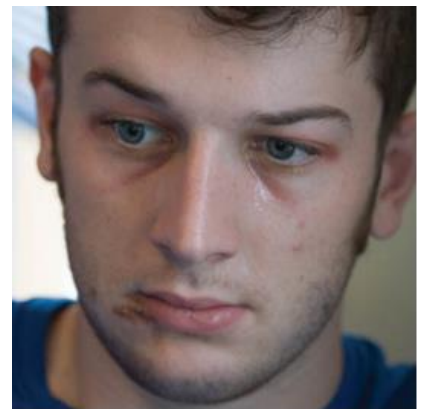


Learning Guide

Loss and grief



23391 Respond to loss and grief in a health or wellbeing setting

Level 3

2 Credits

Name:

Workplace:

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Contents

Introduction	1
Loss	2
Expected (anticipated) loss.....	2
Unexpected loss.....	2
Causes of loss.....	3
Hidden or indirect loss.....	4
Grief	5
The effects of loss and grief.....	7
Emotional effects.....	8
Physical effects	9
Spiritual effects.....	9
Psychological and social effects.....	9
Behaviour patterns caused by grief.....	10
Trauma.....	11
Cultural considerations.....	12
Cultural customs and rituals.....	12
Reactions to grief are personal.....	13
Models of loss and grief.....	14
Healthy responses to grief.....	14
A grief model	15
Supporting someone who is grieving	18
Older people	18
Multiple losses	18
Aging and loss of independence.....	19
Bereavement	19
Loss of a limb, body part or physical function.....	20
An holistic approach	21
Coping with your own loss and grief	23
Multiple losses	23
Social support	23
Good self-care.....	23

Introduction

Grief is a natural reaction after we experience some sort of loss. The recovery and healing process can take time and varies from person to person. This guide will help you cope with loss and grief.

How to use your learning guide

This guide supports your learning and prepares you for the unit standard assessment. The activities and scenarios should be used as a general guide for learning.

This guide relates to the following unit standard:

- 23391 Respond to loss and grief in a health or wellbeing setting (level 3, 2 credits).

This guide is yours to keep. Make it your own by writing notes that help you remember things, or where you need to find more information.

Follow the tips in the notes column.

You may use highlight pens to show important information and ideas, and think about how this information applies to your work.

You might find it helpful to talk to colleagues or your supervisor.

Finish this learning guide before you start on the assessment.

What you will learn

This topic will help you to:

- recognise the impact of loss and grief on people.
- respond to loss and grief.
- describe ways for yourself and for others to cope with loss and grief.

What you will need

To complete this topic, you will need:

- this learning guide.
- your trainee assessment for this topic.
- forms from your workplace, such as:
 - personal plans.
 - observation forms.
- information about the people you support.

Loss

Loss is the fact or process of losing something or someone.

Loss can be expected or unexpected.

Expected (anticipated) loss

This is when you know the loss will occur. To some extent you can prepare yourself for the loss when it is expected.

For example, a terminal illness, or a long-term health condition that over time may result in a deterioration of the person, for example, cancer or multiple sclerosis.

Unexpected loss

This type of loss is sudden and not anticipated and is usually caused by a traumatic or unexpected event like an accident. Such events can include:

- sudden death of a loved one.
- a health related condition like a heart attack or stroke.
- disability from an accident, illness, or age related condition.
- loss of a limb, body part or physical function.
- loss of a loved one through divorce, separation, desertion.
- miscarriage, stillbirth or abortion.
- learning that your child has been diagnosed with a disability.
- moving away from a familiar environment.
- loss of your job.
- loss of independence after an accident or illness.

Handy tips to help ease the feelings associated with grief

• get enough sleep



Handy Tips

There are handy tips provided throughout this learning guide.

These are suitable for both the person experiencing a grief or loss situation and for you as you support the person through their grief.

Causes of loss

We often associate grief and loss with bereavement (the loss of a loved one) but we can experience loss through a variety of different causes.

There are many situations in which loss can occur.

- Physical 'structural' loss such as the loss of a limb, hair or teeth, or the loss of body image through surgery, burns or accidents.
- Physical 'functional' loss through age related conditions such as having a stroke, or experiencing deafness, blindness, or arthritis.
- Psychological loss, such as the loss of memory, judgement, pride, control, status, independence, usefulness, esteem, values or ideas.
- Social loss, such as the loss of a role you have in the community, or the loss of employment, friends, a geographic move or inability to participate in social activities.
- Community and cultural loss such as through immigration or refugee experiences.
- Personal loss, like the loss of one's independence as one ages, or not being able to achieve goals, or seeing hopes and aspirations for the future as being unattainable.
- Loss of possessions such as money and valuables through robbery/theft, or a 'con'.
- Loss of symbols of identity, for example, personal possessions and photographs through a natural disaster.
- The loss of an object, for example, something that has great personal meaning to you, something of value or something that is essential to your wellbeing/lifestyle.
- The loss of a person, for example, a loved one, a person you work with, an associate, a consumer, through illness, goal achievements or changing needs.
- A decline in health and wellbeing for you, or someone close to you perhaps through ageing or illness, sudden trauma or an accident.
- Breakdown in your marriage, for example, through separation, divorce, illness, health status or death.
- Change in your job, for example, the nature of your job changes and the people you support changes, or you retire.
- A change in the place where you live, or where you work, or a known environment.

Hidden or indirect loss

When we talk about loss we may be talking about something that is really obvious, for example a person who loses a leg has an obvious loss.

A person who loses a leg or has a disability not only has the physical loss of ability to deal with, but also **hidden or indirect losses** such as:

- the ability to keep up with peers.
- some of the possibilities for recreation or employment.
- a lack of confidence in social situations.
- a sense of loss of control over their own life.
- personal hopes for what the future held.

Full awareness of a loss can happen suddenly or may take some time.



Handy tips to help ease the feelings associated with grief

- go out and have a coffee with friends



Grief

Grief is the natural reaction we have after we experience some sort of loss. The recovery and healing process can take time and varies from person to person.

Grief can be a short-lived process or can be a long, drawn-out process. Each person reacts differently and experiences grief in a different way. The process may be slow and painful, but it can be self-healing and needs to be recognised.

Grief can cause the way someone usually behaves to change and often the person will act out of character. This is normal.

Grief does not:

- have a timeframe.
- follow a set of rules.
- always follow particular stages.

Grief helps a person to let go of the past and adjust to a different life and move forward.

All grief is different and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Feelings that you experience may be greatly different from day to day.

There is no single pathway through grief. People can feel multiply emotions over a period of time and may reach a point of acceptance, only to have a birthday or some other significant factor plunge them back into despair. Siblings mourning the same parent can experience their grief in completely different ways.

In your role as a support worker you will come across situations where loss has occurred and grief is being experienced.

Grief and loss will be experienced throughout someone's life and it is essential that feelings and emotions are expressed. It can take time for people to 'heal' so treat people experiencing loss and grief with patience, kindness and respect.

Full awareness of a loss can happen suddenly or may take some time.

Handy tips to help ease the feelings associated with grief

- treat yourself



 **Write**

Read the following scenario and answer the questions below.

Harry is in his 80s and he has lived alone in his pensioner flat for several years, although he has family in another part of the town.

Recently Harry had a spell in hospital. His family, who are worried about how well he is managing on his own, talk him into going into a rest home near where they live, across town. Harry can't take his car or his cat to the rest home and he feels really sad about that. He moves in but after a few weeks in the rest home he stops eating and spends a lot of time in his room alone. He doesn't socialise with the other residents and he has very few visitors come to see him. The rest home staff think Harry may be grieving for his old life and the things he has lost since coming to live at the rest home.

What losses has Harry suffered?

What has caused this loss?

What symptoms of grief and loss is Harry showing?

What are two things that Harry's caregivers could do to help Harry?

The effects of loss and grief

There is a variety of emotions that people will feel and these can all vary, depending on the person. We may have feelings of disbelief, panic, confusion, annoyance, anger and helplessness.

It is not only emotions that are affected by grief. Our bodies also have a reaction to grief. There is a variety of ways our bodies physically respond to grief. We may not sleep, we may feel sick, or be physically exhausted. As well as the emotional and physical responses to grief, our spiritual and psychological wellbeing can also be affected.

It is not enough to know how someone is affected by grief and loss; we need to know how to support the grieving person through the process.

Grief and loss can affect not only the person who has endured loss, but often those people close to and around the person. For example, the loss of a limb affects not only the person who has lost the limb, but also the family, friends, work colleagues and relationships.

With a sudden loss some people experience a sense of guilt or shame, particularly in situations of sudden death or after an accident where they are spared and other(s) are not.



Where death has come after a long illness or suffering, the person who is left behind can feel shame that they secretly wished the person would die quickly so the suffering was over. This can increase guilt because the person feels that it is morally wrong.

Time to work through the grief can be harder if there are others to care for, especially in the early stages. Factors such as difficulty sharing feelings or inability to communicate with others, as well as anxieties related to housing or finances, can make grieving more difficult.

People experiencing grief and loss are impacted in a number of ways. The person's behaviour may change. They will be affected:

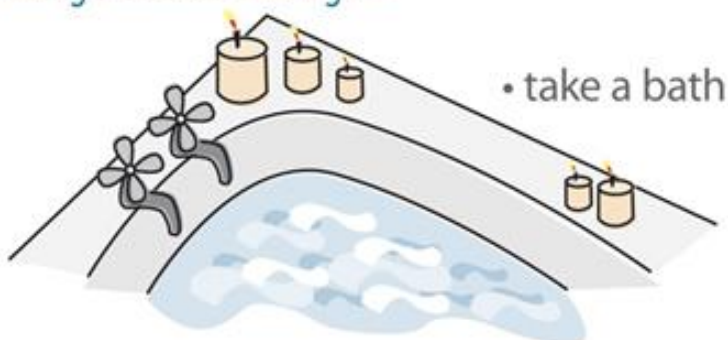
- emotionally.
- physically.
- spiritually.
- psychologically and socially.

Emotional effects

There are a number of common emotional behaviour patterns that can be associated with grief and loss.

- Emotional pain and anguish.
- Low mood – constant sadness.
- Changing moods – fluctuating between irritability and calmness.
- Unprovoked crying.
- Inability to concentrate and complete tasks.
- Inability to move on from the situation.
- Anger and irritability.
- Panic and anxiety.
- Helplessness.
- Apathy.
- Numbness, disbelief, denial.
- Longing and heartache.
- Abandonment and loneliness.
- Self-blame.
- Fear.
- Guilt.
- Relief.
- Remorse and regret.
- Feeling of being incomplete.

Handy tips to help ease the feelings associated with grief



Physical effects

Grief and loss brings actual physical effects which impact upon people.

- Fatigue, feelings of exhaustion, lethargy and weakness.
- Shortness of breath.
- Tightness in the throat.
- Palpitations.
- Nausea.
- Diarrhoea or constipation.
- Aches and pains - abdominal, back pain, headaches.
- Light headedness and feeling dizzy.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Changes in appetite, stomach upsets, and weight loss or gain.
- Change in sex drive.
- Restlessness.
- High blood pressure.
- Colds and recurrent infections.
- Pre-existing conditions like asthma and eczema may get worse.

Spiritual effects

- Doubting their belief system.
- Questioning spiritual values.
- Loss of faith.
- Disappointment in religion, clergy and church members.
- Feeling angry or betrayed by God or other spiritual force.
- Preoccupied with own death.

Psychological and social effects

- Forgetfulness.
- Difficulty in concentrating, and/or slowed thinking.
- Aimless wandering.
- Sense of unreality.
- Dreams about a deceased person.
- Searching for a deceased person.
- Sensing the loved-one's presence.
- Needing to retell the story of the loss or avoiding talking about it.
- Relationship difficulties.
- Lowered self-esteem.

Behaviour patterns caused by grief

There are a number of behaviour patterns caused by grief.

- No longer enjoying activities the person used to do before the grief situation.
- Crying.
- Inability to face the day.
- Isolation - withdrawing socially.
- Lack of concentration.
- Trembling.
- Trouble sleeping and eating.
- Having disturbing dreams.
- Thinking in ways that are not familiar or are disturbing.
- Absent-minded behaviour.
- Avoiding reminders.
- Treasuring objects/places that remind of the loss.
- Restless over-activity.

Handy tips to help ease the feelings associated with grief

- write in a journal or a letter



Trauma

Trauma is the highest level of stress a person can have.

The word trauma evolved from the Greek word for 'wound.' The definition of trauma is something out of the ordinary, which causes serious injury or shock, whether it's physical or psychological.

Sometimes it can be both, such as the result of heart attack, brain injury, stroke, cancer or other chronic illness.

A person who witnesses the death of a spouse or partner will not only go through the grieving process, but is likely to be traumatised as well.

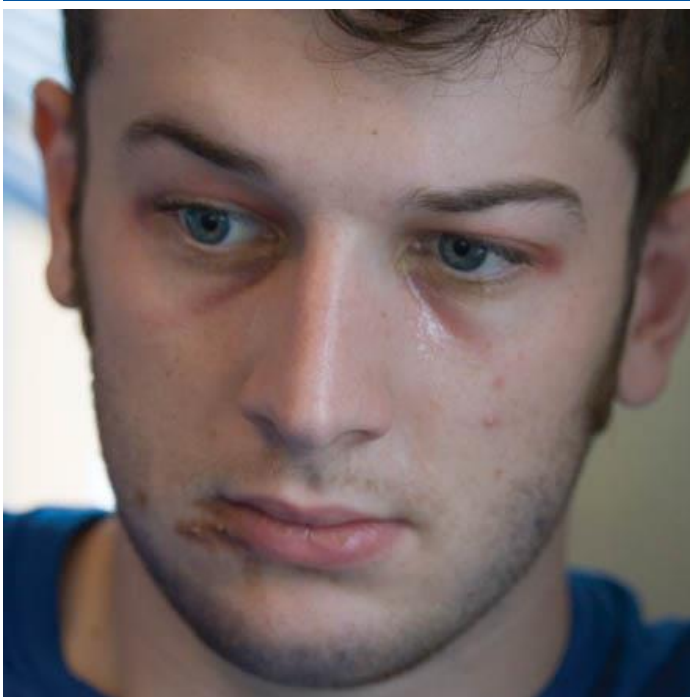
The emotional wound or shock creates substantial lasting damage to the psychological wellbeing of a person.

Psychological trauma can result from accidents, marriage or relationship breakdowns, disappointing experiences, discovery of a life threatening illness, or other situations.

Trauma and grief are often mixed together, especially when a loss is sudden or unexpected, or is seen as being outside the 'normal' cycle of life, such as a stillbirth or miscarriage.

Trauma can be a disabling reaction that stops the natural grieving process and disrupts your life. The effects of grief and trauma can be quite different.

It is not the event that determines whether an event is traumatic, but the individual's experience of the event. Traumatizing events can take a toll on all those involved, even if there was no physical damage.



Cultural considerations

Individual experiences of grief are similar in different cultures. However, different cultures have their own ways of mourning, own traditions and behaviour to express grief and to cope with death. Rituals offer a way for individuals to express their grief.

After a significant loss, some cultures have mourning rituals to mark the passing of time which helps people reconnect with their previous life, as well as providing an organised way to deal with the time around death.

Cultural customs and rituals

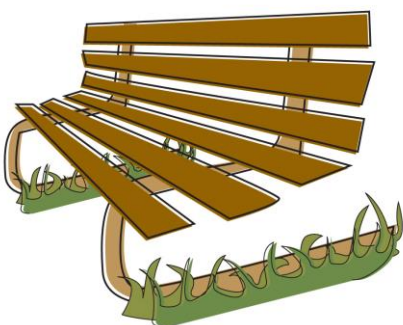
These may include the following points.

- How the dying person should be cared for.
- Who should be present at the actual death of the person.
- Ceremonies that should be performed at the moments before and after death.
- Handling the body after death (cleaning and dressing).
- Spending time with the dead person before burial or cremation.
- Cremation or burial.
- How grief is expressed, for example, privately or openly crying, keening or wailing.
- The period of grieving and how people are expected to behave during the time of mourning, for example, dress, withdrawal from public life.
- The new roles of the family members, for example, a widow may be expected to remarry or an oldest child becomes the family leader.

It is important for people experiencing loss to carry out the expected rituals and customs. These help people to accept the death of someone they care about and to do the necessary 'grief work' they need to. Failure to do this can interfere with the important steps in the grief process, leading to feelings of unresolved loss.

Handy tips to help ease the feelings associated with grief

• relax



Reactions to grief are personal



Reactions to grief are personal. An example of what a person may think is shown above.

Write

Fill in the clouds with how you have responded to grief in your life.



Models of loss and grief

There has been a lot of research done on loss and grief. A number of theories, models, principles and tasks have been developed and used to help people understand grief and loss, and also to help support people through the grief and loss process.

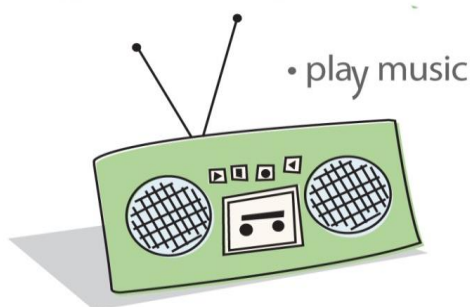
There is no single pathway through grief. People can feel multiple emotions all at once and it will differ from person to person.

Healthy responses to grief

The seven 'Rs' of grief.

-
- R** **Recuperate** —with courage and sleep.
 - R** **Restore** —with healthy food and regular exercise.
 - R** **Rejuvenate** —with regular exercise.
 - R** **Refer** —if concerned about health or wellbeing.
 - R** **Relaxation** —with friends, fun, family, music, holiday etc.
 - R** **Recreation** —with other interests, and being creative.
 - R** **Relationships** —spend time with people who you care about and who care about you.
-
-

Handy tips to help ease the feelings associated with grief



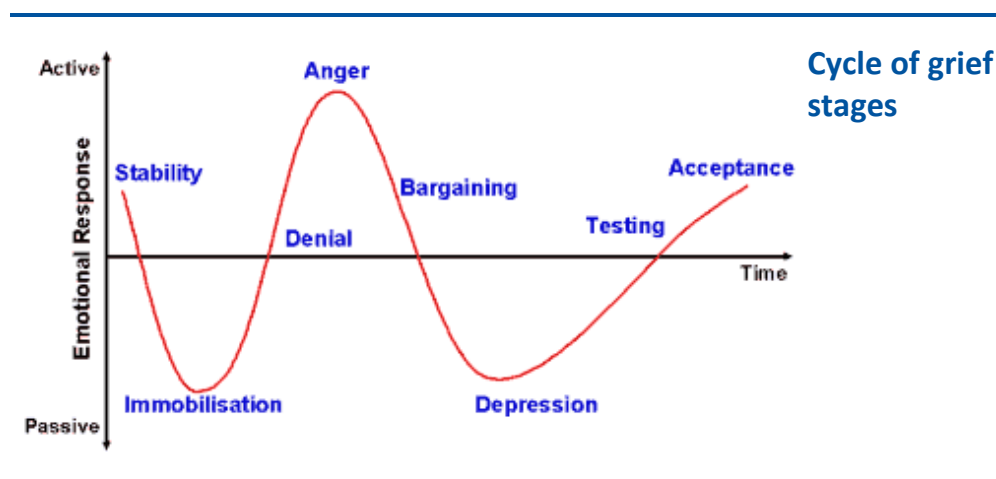
A grief model

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross is well known for her research and work with people who were dying and their families. It is worth reading some of her books on grief and loss. She described the stages of grief as having five stages.

- Denial.
- Anger.
- Bargaining.
- Depression.
- Acceptance.

The five stages of grief

There is no particular order of the grieving process, but this is a model that is used to describe the possible stages of grief that many people will go through. Some people will go through each and every stage; while others may not go through each one or go through them in a different order. This is merely one way of looking at the process of grief.



Denial

This is considered the first step because we often react to trauma and grief by blocking out the memory of the event or by saying to ourselves 'If I don't believe it happened then it didn't happen.' It is a defence mechanism and a perfectly natural reaction.

Anger

People dealing with emotional upset can be angry with themselves, or with others (especially those close to them). Knowing this helps you to keep yourself detached and non-judgemental when experiencing the anger of someone who is very upset.

The anger is often generalised to friends and family who might have little or nothing to do with the event.

Family and friends may regret past actions or not having visited, or spent more time with the person.



Keep yourself detached and non-judgemental when experiencing the anger of someone who is very upset.

Bargaining

The bargaining stage for people facing death will often involve attempting to bargain with whatever God the person believes in. People facing less serious trauma can bargain or seek to negotiate a compromise, for example, when facing a break-up, saying to the other person, “Can we still be friends?”

Depression

Grief may include depressive symptoms such as frequent crying, profound sadness and a low mood. However major depression is a disorder requiring treatment. When grief does not resolve over time, it can indicate that depression is developing. Very depressed people may try to hurt themselves. If you are having thoughts of hurting yourself, or know a person who is, be sure to let someone know and get the appropriate care as soon as possible.

Acceptance

This is the final stage of grief, although a person can go back to any of the other stages. It occurs when the person has begun to accept the reality of the situation and learnt to live with the loss.

The person is able to acknowledge that the event will, or did happen and that it isn't a good or bad thing and that the person is not a bad person for experiencing it. People dying can often enter this stage a long time before the people they leave behind do, and they pass through their own individual stages of dealing with their grief.

Once the fact is accepted, there can be a greater sense of calm and peace for the griever.



Write

Read the following scenario and answer the questions that follow.

It took a lot to make Jack angry, but he was today. Over the last few weeks he seemed to swing from being sad to angry, to making deals with himself and then back to denying he had a problem. Jack had been looking forward to going to a reunion of his mates from the Vietnam War which was being held in England, but Jack was slowly realising that he was not going to make it over there to be with them.

He was trying to accept it, but it wasn't easy. His arthritis was really playing up and he needed support even to get up in the morning and dress himself. The trouble he was having with his hands and fingers affected his ability to give himself the insulin to manage his diabetes. He knew he needed too much support to go alone to England and there was so much now he could not do independently. He could not afford to take another person with him even with the help he had received from the RSA.

The loss of his independence was particularly difficult to cope with because it was his ability to be independent that gave him his sense of self-respect and dignity. Sometimes Jack had to smile to himself: his enemy in the war had not slowed him down for one minute, but his health certainly had now.

How was Jack affected by his grief?

What emotions and behaviour patterns did Jack display?

Looking at the Kubler-Ross model, what stages of grief has Jack been through?

If you were one of Jack's support workers, how would you support him?

Explain how this support was within your scope (role) as a support person.

Supporting someone who is grieving

People who have experienced loss must be given time for the grieving process to take place and must be supported through that process.

Just as there is no right or wrong way to grieve, there is no right or wrong way to help someone who is grieving. Being there for the person, showing understanding, kindness and patience, and extending unconditional support are all important ways to support a grieving person. Grief is a process, not an illness or an isolated event.

There are support services and counselling agencies that can guide people through grief. These offer help and support through the grieving process.

As a support worker you will probably have to support the grief process of people in your care and in a number of situations. Your organisation will have policies and procedures around supporting people who are experiencing a loss and are going through the grieving process.

Older people

Older people may have many losses within a short period of time. An older person who loses a spouse may also experience other losses. For example:

- financial security.
- their best friend.
- social contacts.

Many older people feel lonely when loved ones die or their friends and/or family move away. They may feel that they lack a support system and that they have no-one to confide in.

Multiple losses

The effect of multiple losses on a person can build up over time causing extended grief. People experiencing multiply losses may grieve for each loss, so the time taken to work through their grief may be extended.

Grieving multiple losses takes more emotional and physical energy and can be overwhelming. This grief may be experienced by both the sufferers and the people who regularly work in environments where death is commonplace, for example, a hospice or an aged-care facility.

When a person has more than one loss to cope with at a time, it can be a good idea to separate each loss as this may help the person feel less overwhelmed and more able to cope.

Aging and loss of independence

As people age they have to cope with a lot of different 'events' in their lives as the result of some kind of loss. These setbacks may lead them to feel that they are less able to cope and function independently.

Ageing can lead to losses in both mental and physical abilities, such as remembering appointments, or being able to walk long distances or climb stairs, and a general loss of physical flexibility.

Physical losses may slowly lead to a limited ability to join in social activities. For example, being unable to participate in a daily walk may lead to less contact with other people, or missing out on conversations due to a hearing loss.

A feeling of loss of control can be the result of someone's independence being threatened. For example being unable to drive their car can lead to people feeling a sense of loss over being not able to get to where they want to when they want to. Activities once taken for granted can become extremely difficult to accomplish.

As a support person, encourage the person to talk about their feelings. They may be afraid and angry at not being able to manage on their own, or have a feeling of guilt at having to ask for help or assistance. Not everyone is happy to receive assistance from other people. Encourage the person to make their own decisions on what they can do for themselves.

Bereavement

Bereavement usually refers to a loss due to death. Everyone reacts differently when they lose a loved one.

You can support a person who has experienced a loss and who is grieving by helping them to:

- accept their feelings.
- allow themselves to cry.
- take some time out.
- share memories with others.
- take the time needed to say goodbye (where able).
- talk to others, and not to 'bottle feelings up'.
- write down how they feel.

Loss of a limb, body part or physical function

The same grief process occurs when people lose a limb or find that they are unable to perform a physical function.

Losing a limb means losing a part of your physical self. Women who have a breast removed (mastectomy) may experience grief associated with body image and changes in sexuality.

Adults may feel that their self-image becomes more negative and this can impact on their relationships. Some people may avoid social situations as a result of their loss.

It takes time to work through the emotions and adjust to the loss.

As a support person you can encourage the person to:

- talk to someone who has been through the same experience, for example through a support group.
- plan ways that they can become active again and do things that they like.
- do something for someone who needs them or needs something done.
- believe that things will get better; get them to practise positive thinking, speaking and acting.
- talk about the details of the incident with someone who knows how to listen.
- not expect things to be the same as they were before they lost their limb or function.

Handy tips to help ease the feelings associated with grief



- sit by an open fire — watching the flames is soothing, hypnotic and warming.

An holistic approach

All parts of 'our being' are affected by loss - spiritual, emotional, physical and social.

Spiritual

Spiritual wellbeing involves possessing a set of guiding beliefs, principles or values that help give direction to one's life. A high level of faith, hope and commitment to individual beliefs provide people with a sense of meaning and purpose. You can help by:

- encouraging the person to grieve at their own rate.
- identifying opportunities for growth in the challenges currently facing them.
- respecting the person's beliefs and listening without passing judgement.
- encouraging the person to spend time alone and to meditate regularly.

Emotional

Emotional wellness is feeling and expressing human emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, optimism, self-esteem, love and having achieved a sense of fulfilment in life. This is affected greatly when someone experiences a loss of some sort. Identifying the obstacles that prevent us from achieving emotional wellness and taking appropriate steps to cope with such problems is important.

You can support the grieving person to:

- express thoughts and feelings - be a good listener and do not judge or criticise others.
- try to develop an optimistic attitude, and offer hope.
- seek support (professional and informal).
- practice stress management techniques.
- accept and forgive themselves.
- cry; tears are healthy - do not try to stop them.

Handy tips to help ease the feelings associated with grief

- eat some fruit and veges each day



Physical

Physical wellness includes a variety of healthy behaviour patterns including adequate exercise, proper nutrition, and not getting into harmful habits, ie, drugs and excessive alcohol. You can encourage the person who is experiencing loss to:

- exercise daily, make an exercise plan, and join them in the exercise.
- get adequate rest.
- recognise early signs of illness.
- eat a variety of healthy foods, and perhaps help them cook a meal.
- use alcohol in moderation.



Social

The ability to cultivate healthy relationships is an essential part of our social wellbeing. Social wellbeing is often neglected when someone is going through the grieving process. Another aspect of social wellbeing is intellectual wellness, striving for personal growth and seeking out and using new information for personal and social development.

Although at a time of loss this can be difficult when supporting someone who is grieving, encourage the person to be open to new ideas and master new skills. Encouraging them to keep up-to-date with current events and participate in activities that arouse their minds are also important.

You can support the person to work through the situation by:

- caring about the person and making them feel comfortable with you.
- recognising their loneliness and talking to them when needed.
- providing support, comfort and friendship.
- encouraging them to continue with their social activities.
- recognising that the person's life has changed and encouraging them to participate in activities that involve and build a support network.
- giving appropriate relevant advice, direction and focus

Coping with your own loss and grief

All the support strategies on the previous pages equally apply to coping yourself with grief and loss. Here are some tips to help you ease the feelings often associated with grief.

Multiple losses

As a support worker, you may work in an environment where death is commonplace. People experiencing multiple losses tend to grieve for each loss. Try to separate each loss. This may help you feel less overwhelmed by the events and more able to cope.

Social support

Talking about the loss, sharing your cares, concerns and anxieties and getting support from others are all vital components of healthy grieving. Maintain your normal activities as much as possible, especially those that include your normal support network such as your close friends, church groups, work colleagues, sports team etc.

Identifying and discussing your feelings may help you to reflect on what is happening to you. This can help you put things into perspective and come to an understanding of how the changes affect your life.

Good self-care

Get enough rest and sleep to prevent physical exhaustion and potential illness. When you sleep, your mind makes sense of what is happening in your life.

Try to take part in activities that help you to relax. Eat nourishing food. Do not give in to the temptation to eat comfort food only and get plenty of exercise.

Other positive self-care ideas could be to:

- walk along the beach.
- reminisce with photos.
- talk with a friend.
- have a massage.
- take time out with a DVD or a good movie.

 **Write**

My notes →

Find out about your organisation's policies and procedures that deal with grief and loss and answer the following questions.

What do they say about supporting people experiencing grief and loss?

How do you make sure that the support you provide is within personal and work boundaries?

What do the policies and procedures say about supporting you, the support worker, through a workplace grief and loss situation?