

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Mental Health & Wellbeing

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Grief and loss

Grief is our natural response to loss. Grief can happen in response to the loss of a friend or family member, but also in response to other significant losses. Grief impacts everyone differently and looks different from person to person, and there's no one 'right' way to grieve. Grief can impact every part of your life and sometimes it may feel overwhelming or never-ending, but it's important to know that there are people and services there to support you, and over time, you will find ways to live with your loss and move keep moving forward- for most people, the intensity of grief eases over time.

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What is grief?

You may have heard of the [five stages of grief](#) before- denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Lots of people experience some or all of these stages following a loss, but they can happen in any order. People may go back and forth between the stages, and some people might process grief differently than these ways. It's important to understand that grief looks different for every person, and there's no set way to grieve.

What causes grief?

Grief is a reaction to loss, and often the first kind of grief that comes to mind is when a family member or friend dies, but grief can also be caused by other major losses. Some situations that can cause grief include:

- A loved one's death
- Terminal illness diagnosis
- Major changes to health, such as the result of an accident, or the onset of illness or disability
- Breakdown of a relationship
- The death of a pet
- Losing a job
- Miscarriage or infertility
- Losing a home, such as in a natural disaster

Effects of grief

Some common feelings or impacts of grief include:

- Sadness
- Shock or disbelief
- Numbness
- Denial about the loss
- Anger or resentment
- Guilt
- Relief
- Anxiety
- Difficulty focusing, concentrating, and remembering
- Difficulty thinking about anything other than your loss
- Changes to your appetite and sleep
- Physical reactions like tiredness, headaches or nausea

- Not wanting to do your normal activities or be around other people

How long does grief last?

[Grief doesn't have a set timeline](#), and can be experienced for a long time. At first, grief tends to be stronger, but becomes less intense over time. Grief can come and go, and you may find particular occasions such as birthdays or anniversaries are harder than other times. It's important to remember that even if you might feel overwhelmed sometimes, things will eventually get easier. If you're finding that you're having trouble coping with your grief, there's supports available to help you - have a look at the supports section below for a list of places you can find help.

Strategies for managing grief

Just like grief looks different for every person, so too are the best ways to cope with grief different for different people. Whichever way you find works best for you, try to make sure you're taking care of yourself, accepting support from others when you need to, and finding someone to talk about your loss with if that's helpful. You might find some of the [below ideas](#) useful:

Take care of yourself

Grief can be tiring, [and taking care of yourself](#) can help you cope better through your grief. As best you can, try to get enough sleep, eat well and drink enough water, spend some time being active and get outside. Avoid using alcohol and other drugs to cope.

It's OK if these things are a bit tricky right now - try setting small goals or finding some new daily routines that make sure you're eating food that's good for your body, getting the rest you need, and meeting your hygiene needs. For example, even getting up by 8 am to brush your teeth.

It's important to try to be kind to yourself when you're experiencing grief - it's normal to have trouble thinking or remembering. It's also normal to have strong feelings, and to cry- try to remember that it's ok to cry if you feel the need to, whether that's alone or with other people.

Try some strategies like mindfulness or deep breaths- [Griefline](#) has a [mindfulness exercise](#) and some other strategies to help make it easier to rest, relax and sleep, or you could try the Smiling Mind app found in the [apps](#) section of this page.

Support from others

Take time to yourself when you need to, but also try to stay connected with family and friends- both are important when dealing with grief. It's important to have space to yourself, but isolation can make coping with grief harder- you might not feel like going places or doing activities, but planning times to do some of the things you enjoy by yourself or with others can be really helpful.

If you feel comfortable, you might want to talk about your loss with others. Sometimes the people around you might not know how to help- it's ok to let them know what you find helpful, whether that's someone to cry with, some meals, or someone to give you a hand with some tasks around the house.

Some people find support groups helpful- some of the organisations in the [community support](#) section below provide support groups.

If you feel like you're having a difficult time coping with your grief, you can look at the [University support](#) and [Community support](#) sections of this page for places where you can get help from a counsellor or other professionals who can help support you through this time.

Find a way to express your feelings and thoughts- writing letters, poetry, songs or doing journalling might be helpful, but some people other options like art, photography or other creative expressions.

Grieve and remembering

If you've lost someone you love, there are lots of ways to honour their memory. You might want to talk about them with others who knew them, organise a memorial, or visit their grave or memorial site when you're ready.

You might want to create a space in your home dedicated to remembering them, with some of their favourite things, photos of them, or anything else that feels appropriate.

Doing the things that you used to enjoy doing with them, or doing something to remember them like participating in a charity or cause that was important to them might be something you'd like to do.

You might have certain religious or cultural rituals which are important to you and help you remember and commemorate your loved one or bring you comfort as you grieve.

Whichever things you find helpful, try to take things one day at a time, be prepared that some days might be harder than others, like anniversaries, and remember that though grief can come and go, healing will come in time.

Grief and my studies

Experiencing grief at university can be hard. Difficulties with sleep, memory, and staying focused can make studying and classes hard. Another challenging situation is if you've lost a loved one and you're living away from home for studies.

However, some people find that being at university can be helpful after a loss- it can help fill time and give you something to do, and be something that feels normal in a time when everything else might feel different.

Some [strategies](#) that might help with coping with grief and studies at university:

- **Ask for help**- there's a lot of different support available to help at Western Sydney University, which you can find the details of in the [university resources](#) section below. Services like the [Counselling Service](#) can help talk with academic staff and help you understand what supports are available in regards to your studies.
- If you're living away from your family and your grief is connected to your family or home community, you might find it helpful to find ways to **stay connected**, like setting up a regular phone call.
- **Try setting small goals**- it might feel harder to do the things you need to do, like working on studies or spending time with uni friends but setting small goals can help making the things you want and need to do feel less overwhelming.
- **Keep organised**- when you're experiencing grief, you might find it harder than usual to keep track of what you need to do. Western Sydney University has some [planners](#) available which are specifically designed around the university schedule, or you might find other resources helpful like paper journals, [Google Calendar](#), or a to-do app like [Microsoft To Do](#) or [Todoist](#).

University support

If you would like to access some support, the WSU [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

- **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or phone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370. Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30pm. Alternatively, or email counselling@westernsydney.edu.au

- **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email disability@westernsydney.edu.au or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

- **WSU [Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

- **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au.

- **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

- **Disruption to studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

- **Deferred Exam**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

- **Withdraw Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

- **Leave of absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant census date

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

Community support

- [Lifeline](#) (24 hours crisis counselling) - 13 11 14
Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text 0477 13 11 14 and somebody will text you back! You can find more information [here](#).
- [Mental Health Telephone Access Line](#)
Available 24/7 to everyone in NSW on **1800 011 511**. Provides professional help and advice and referrals to local mental health services.
- [Griefline](#) is an organisation which supports all Australians experiencing grief. They provide telephone support on 1300 845 745 (8am-8pm AEST Mon-Fri), as well as online forums, support groups and resources about grief and loss on their website.
- The [National Association for Grief and Loss](#) provides free, confidential, grief and loss support services across NSW. You can contact them on 02 6882 9222 or complete the 'Client Enquiry Form' on their website and a NALAG team member will contact you within 2 business days. Their website also has useful resources and information about grief and loss.
- [Beyondblue](#) can be contacted by telephone on 1300 22 4636, or they also have an [online chat](#).

Resources

- [Websites](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Videos](#)
- [Apps](#)

Websites

[This Way Up](#) - Self-paced online programs that teach clinically-proven strategies to help you improve the way you feel.

[My Compass](#) – This free online treatment program has been developed by the Black Dog Institute to help people better self-manage mild-to-moderate symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress.

[Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement](#) – An independent, not-for-profit organisation that provides education to help support the wellbeing of people experiencing bereavement. Their website provides access to information, resources and webinars.

Podcasts

“How to better respond to a friend experiencing grief”

ABC Sydney discuss some helpful tips on how to better respond to a friend in the depths of grief, whilst reflecting on personal experiences.

<https://www.abc.net.au/sydney/how-to-better-respond-to-a-friend-experiencing-grief/11546720>

“David Kessler and Brené on Grief and Finding Meaning”

David Kessler, a grief expert, talks about love, loss, and finding meaning.

“Caring for Someone in Their Last Months”

Cancer Council NSW talks about advanced cancer and the questions, fears, and supports available.

https://www.cancercouncil.com.au/advanced-cancer-podcasts/caring-for-someone-in-their-last-months/?fbclid=IwAR0xA3ryjZBa1I8pndx_fYBzXnDk57ErQJHksaQqsKFR691vMiOcfjiX9kc

Videos

[How did grief impact your university experience?](#)

[Losing a parent: Understood](#)

[What is Grief? \(Tonkins Model\)](#)

Apps

[MyGrief app](#) – Developed by the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, the MyGrief app provides information, tools and resources to support bereaved people and also provides practical strategies for families and friends on how best to support someone in the midst of their bereavement.

[Smiling Mind](#): A free, evidence-based mindfulness and meditation app. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to help manage stress, resilience, anxiety, depression and improve general health and wellbeing.

Still struggling?

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional. Remember you are not alone and there will always be someone out there who is willing to stay with you through your hard times.

Please find the attached PDF document [here](#).

References

[Griefline – Coping with Grief](#)

[Palliative Care – Understanding Grief](#)

[Beyond Blue – Grief, Loss and Depression](#)

[Health Direct – Grief and Loss](#)

[Headspace – Grief](#)

[Headspace – Grief and Loss](#)

[Funeral Guide – Coping with Bereavement at University or College](#)