

Making choices for life

Fact Sheet 4

DEATH AND LOSS OUR EMOTIONAL RESPONSE



KEY MESSAGES

- Death and dying raises many questions and each person will respond and act in different ways.
- **Loss:** the severing or breaking of an attachment to someone or something resulting in a changed relationship.
- **Grief:** the normal response to loss. It includes physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual. The feeling is usually associated with unhappiness, sadness, pain, anger, guilt and longing for the person or thing.
- **Bereavement:** is the total reaction to loss. This process includes 'healing' from the loss.
- Grief is a part of the normal cycle of life.
- Grief is a beneficial process as it provides continuing bonds with the person who has died. These bonds are dynamic and ever changing. These bonds provide continuity, comfort and solace.
- Creating a supportive environment to support, to care and to encourage self and others in times of need.
- Everybody grieves differently.
- There is no one correct way to grieve.
- Look after yourself; manage your own emotional wellbeing through your own appropriate strategies.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Identify and reflect upon your own emotional response to death and dying and the potential impact of personal responses on you.
- Raise any issues with your Supervisor or an appropriate person.
- Use coping strategies such as exercise, activities, social outings, group membership, talking with others, movies, faith practices (prayer).
- Many staff find it helpful to be able to just talk and have someone listen to how they are feeling and in many cases to realise they are not alone and that grief is a normal process.
- Accept the need for bereavement care and support for yourself and other team members.
- Follow organisational protocols in relation to managing emotional responses and ethical issues.
- Most workplaces will have either Chaplains, counsellors, pastoral care workers available for you to talk to. Debriefing sessions may be very helpful to assist in your grieving process.
- Providing opportunities to formally acknowledge the death of the person, the anxiety surrounding the event and willingness to discuss feelings and thoughts.
- Bereavement support should take into consideration all people, including staff, volunteers and friends of the client as well as the client's loved ones; all should be welcomed and respected.
- Some staff find individual counselling helpful to deal with their emotions.

WHY IT WORKS

- Understanding cultural, religious or spiritual difference to allow an individual to grieve the way they need to grieve for themselves.
- Awareness and knowledge about grief can assist you to identify when you may need support.
- Awareness enables you to refer others, such as family members and colleagues, if they demonstrate signs of not coping (e.g. restlessness, not sleeping, feeling depressed, feeling life has no meaning, over sensitivity, over reactions, loss of appetite, loss of motivation, feeling guilty, social withdrawal, feelings of hopelessness).
- The greater the support both loved ones and you can access, the better the ability to cope with grief and bereavement. It is both the quality of the support and the quantity of support that enhances resilience and can assist in the process of moving through the bereavement process.

REFERENCES

<http://www.ekrfoundation.org/five-stages-of-grief/>

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/ac15>

Palliative Approach Toolkit – www.caresearch.com.au/PAToolkit

http://www.aacqa.gov.au/providers/home-care/processes-and-resources/resources-specifically-for-home-care/fact-sheets/homecarecommonstandsv14_0.pdf