

Dealing with grief when your family member dies

A carer's grief

When your family member dies you may feel a whirlwind of emotions, from intense grief and loss to relief and calmness. You may have jumbled thoughts, a somewhat foggy feeling and difficulty making decisions. You may also wonder what life after caring will be like.

Everyone experiences and works through their grief in different ways. Some carers and families feel these emotions almost immediately, while others keep busy making funeral and other arrangements.

It is important to know that there is no set time for grieving - this is individual. Grief is not like a light switch that we can turn on and off. For some it takes longer to feel that the fog is lifting.

When well-meaning friends and family suggest you 'pull up your socks' or 'stop moping about the house' because 'time heals all wounds', you may question whether you are coping at all. Remember that your family will be coming to terms with their own grief and may not know what to say or how to support you at this time.

Here are some ways to help yourself:

- ▣ Talk to someone you trust about how you're feeling and the difficulties you're facing. Don't bottle up your emotions.
- ▣ See your GP - let them know how you're feeling.
- ▣ Call the **Carer Line** on **1800 242 636*** just to talk. Ask about the National Carer Counselling Program which can be of great benefit.
- ▣ Look for other people who could support you. Perhaps revisit the residential care staff, other carers at the facility or your carer support group.

When grieving does not lessen with time

For some carers the overwhelming sense of loss and grief does not ease with time - or it may ease temporarily and then continue to peak and trough. While it is natural to grieve heavily for someone you have known and loved, intense and prolonged grief can be of concern.

This is not uncommon in carers, particularly if you have devoted much of your time to caring for your family member. Many of your support networks will have been based around your carer role. The loss of these 'friends' is just another thing you will be dealing with.

Similarly the loss of your carer role will impact on how you feel - over time your carer role may have shaped 'who you are'. You may be wondering what the future will hold and unsure of what to do next. The thought of rediscovering a life for yourself may be overwhelming.

At this time some carers may experience fluctuations in their health, ongoing tearfulness, anger and anxiety - and withdraw from the support of others around them. These and other factors can be signs of depression which many people will experience in their lifetime.

Depression is treated in different ways. One of the most effective treatments for mild or moderate depression is counselling. That is, talking through your thoughts and feelings with someone who understands and can support you in this. In some cases, medication may also be beneficial, helping to give carers the 'lift' they might need before they are ready to see a counsellor.



If you think you may have depression, don't try to deal with this on your own - it is nothing to be ashamed of. Seek the support you need.

Carers who have been through this recommend the following:

- ☒ Revisit your GP if things are getting worse or not improving over time - be honest about how you are feeling.
- ☒ Contact the **Carer Line** on **1800 242 636*** to be put in contact with a carer counsellor.
- ☒ Speak to family and friends about how you're feeling. Don't shut them out at a time when they could offer you support.
- ☒ Talk to other carers you know. They may have had a similar experience and be able to offer good advice.

Further information:

- ☒ ['An Unrecognised Grief. Loss and grief issues for carers: A carer's guide.'](#)
Order from [Carers Victoria](#) - ph: 03 9396 9500.
- ☒ [National Carer Counselling Program](#) - ph: 1800 242 636*.

Contact the **Carer Line** on **1800 242 636*** to request the above information sheets be sent to you - or to find out about other information sheets in this series.

*Free call except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates.

We do our best to keep these links up to date, but the internet changes all the time. If you can no longer access any of the above resources, please go to our [Internet Troubleshooting Guide](#), or email us at website@carersvic.org.au