

Paradise Kids
Helping to Heal the Heartache

www.paradisekids.org.au

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*Grief is Love not wanting to let go of what has been,
and never will be again (in quite the same way.)*



Grief and Healing

by Deirdre Hanna, Founder and President, Hopewell Hospice and Paradise Kids

Grief is painful. It is about letting go and saying goodbye. For example, the recent floods have created personal, family and communal grief. People grieve differently but, for many people, the pain of grief is as acute as any physical pain. In our society, the emotional pain of grief can often be overlooked and, while the physical clean up of debris after the floods is necessary for health, the emotional and physical healing needs to be recognised and attended to at the same time.

Experiencing the pain of loss, shedding tears, talking to someone about the loss, and turning to friends or family for support is a vital part of our healing process. Grief is a natural, normal and necessary part of our humanity.

Grief is your emotional response to a loss of any kind.



The word bereavement comes from a word meaning "torn up", a feeling that many will readily associate with. It feels as if you have been stripped of something, of having your heart torn open.

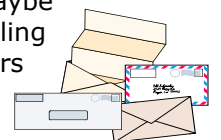
Grief takes many forms - death of a loved one, divorce or separation or addiction, loss of a home through financial hardship, flood or fire, moving house, loss of a pet, moving to a different area, changing schools, losing possessions, photos, books and memorabilia. These and other losses cause great anguish.

Any of the following reactions may occur after a loss and, if you recognise them, it may help to know that you are experiencing what many, many people go through. Although no one can know how deeply **you** feel, you can know that these reactions are normal.

- **Feelings:** Sadness, anxiety, insecurity, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, yearning for the loved one or home, shock, numbness. Fear that you will never be safe again. Allow the feelings to be present, notice them, name them if you can and write about them, through story telling or poetry. Write or play an instrument or dance out your feelings to music. Music might stir up strong feelings but can soothe them as well. If you are angry punch a pillow or rip up newspapers.
- **Physical reactions:** Hollowness in the stomach, pain in the heart, tightness in the chest and throat, oversensitive to noise, breathlessness, weakness in the muscles, lack of energy, dry mouth, susceptibility to viruses, cold sores and rashes. These are normal reactions to the stress of grief. Try to breathe deeply into the parts of your body that are hurting.
- **Cognitive disturbances:** Disbelief, confusion, preoccupation with what used to be, sense of the presence of the loved one or pet. These are normal reactions to a loss of any kind. You are not going crazy.
- **Behaviour changes:** Appetite and sleep disturbances, absent mindedness, withdrawal from friends or family, dreams of the loved one or past life, searching and calling out, sighing, restlessness, overactivity, crying, treasuring objects. Try to get some exercise to dispel the chemicals of stress, try to write, journal, draw and paint or create but, most importantly, recognise that these reactions are normal.



If you experience any of these symptoms, you can help your own healing by doing things such as having a cuppa with someone, talking, sharing, writing these feelings down, crying - alone or with someone who has also suffered a loss, and writing imaginary letters to your loved one or pet or even your home. What were you grateful for? What will you miss? What will you maybe gain... in time? (You don't need to post them; just the act of writing is a healing process. Studies have shown that your immune system is boosted!). Your tears even help remove chemicals linked to stress and that helps in healing. It is healthy to cry! If you have a pet, pat it often. Stroking pets is also very healing.



Once you have recognised these symptoms, reactions and feelings in yourself, you will be able to help others who are going through the same pain. You will be able to reassure them that they are not going crazy, they are simply saying goodbye to their loved one, with all of their being.

A grief shared, makes the burden lighter.

