

Healing pathways¹

“No matter what supports people receive, they still grieve. You’ve got to grieve - that’s a healing process in itself. If you don’t grieve you don’t heal. It’s the way that you grieve. You need to find a healthy way.”

“Everybody just grieves differently. And the thing is people should be allowed to express that, put that grief out there and there should be an understanding.”

The importance of family and community

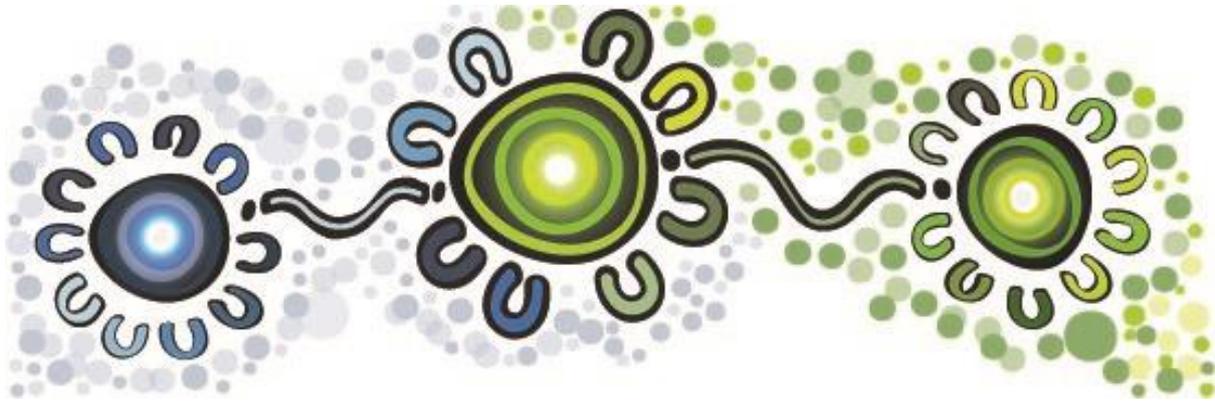
The family is the most important support for people in bereavement:

In moments of grief and loss in my life ... the connectedness of family holds me strong and moves me to another place... that connectedness from those who are grounded.

You go and sit and have a yarn with your family and that might be a good way to sort of ease the healing process and help through the grief and loss. In the middle you make a big fire where they can go out and sit and have tea and coffee and a yarn and do some cooking... bring warmth and it’s part of the healing process when you lose your loved ones. And if you’re around positive people and you’re thinking positive all the time.

In our communities we help each other through grief and loss by being together socially, like having our sports and regular events – like our footy comps, softball, and through that people get around and their family get to see them. They can spend a couple of days looking after them and they might say, “Why don’t you come with us – stay with us for a couple of months. And then go home later on when you’re feeling a bit better.” And that’s important because we’ve grown up according to our brothers or our father’s brother, respecting them that way like fathers, and mother’s sisters are like mothers. So if you lose a parent, you know your uncles and aunts they can provide, and try and fill in that role as family.

¹ These are quotations from Aboriginal people interviewed for the *Rising Spirits Community Resilience project*. The Aboriginal Health Council of SA Inc. July, 2015.



The importance of country

Going out bush or back to country can be a healing process for people:

In times of need, we need to go and look after the country for families. Country comes first. She's very powerful, mother earth and our land and spiritual land are all there. There's grief and loss for us mob and we need to have places to go to, to feel happy within ourselves.

Programs like the Warna-Manda Aboriginal Corporation <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Warna-Manda-Aboriginal-Corporation/165724036900750> include creative activities with bush trips.

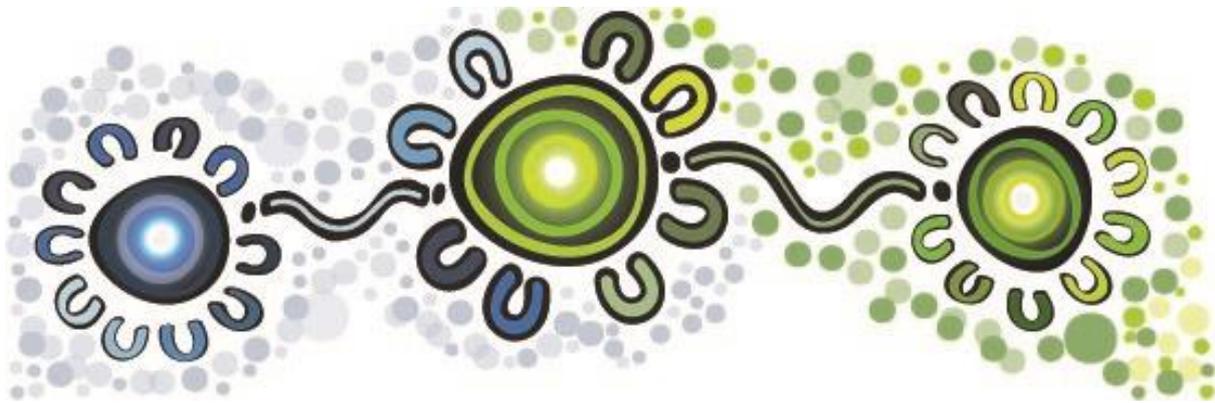
We have our own corporation [Warna-Manda] which the women of our family run. And we take people back to country, families, women and children. We do camps. It's all about the healing – taking people back. It's beautiful at Streaky Bay. It's a really healing place - you can feel it. In one of the programs we get the women involved in arts and crafts on country and it's helping them to heal. We talk about their identity – where they belong. You never forget your identity and keep strong and because if you don't look after yourself how are you supposed to look after your little ones and the rest of your family.

Talking to someone

Counselling with a trusted counsellor can be very therapeutic. That counsellor may or may not have formal training. They could be a trusted family member, a friend, or a respected professional.

Women's, Men's, Elders' and Youth groups provide the opportunity for yarning, being listened to and sharing of stories. These groups usually include yarning over a cuppa and snacks, in a safe place, with the option to do a variety of creative activities, and bush trips:

There is a drop in centre, where they can sit down and paint and write poems, or do some arts and crafts where it's helping them. They can just go there and they know instead of going and reaching for a bottle, 'Okay, I'll drop in the centre and instead of buying drink, I'll do the arts and craft, and then that'll keep me – and I can express my grief.'



Creative activities can include painting, leather work, poetry or song writing and singing:

That's how I got by, I wrote poems. And I just sat down and went on and on and on and wrote poems. And I got by my grief, by writing poems.

And we have a women's art group and women do dot paintings and tell their story and within their own story there's their family and sometimes what's missing in the family and so they're highlighting their losses through that, and while they're talking, they're kind of sharing over a meal together.

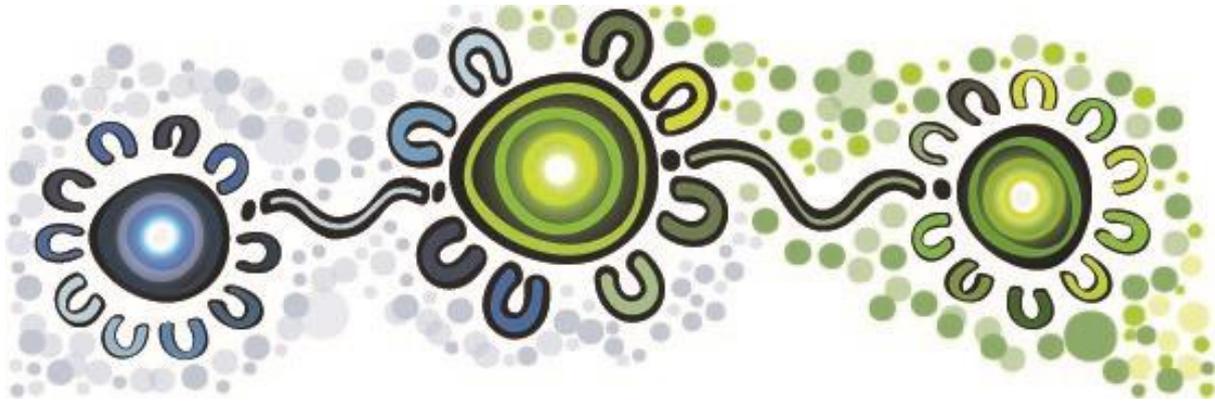
We've got a shed there and the men's group come there, play music instruments, write songs and stuff like that and that's when they talk about things. And those songs are about how they stopped the grog or it might be about a trauma and how they overcame that. So they're actually able to take a tune, go home, think about the words and then come back and put that together in a song and that seems to be a very powerful way of dealing with loss.

The importance of culture in grieving

Symbolism can inspire healing thoughts:

Many Aboriginal people have some Christian belief but also recognise that they do need to honour the dead in the ways that have been honoured in the past. I can remember last year going to the funeral of an elder down at Meningie and we were there and it was a wonderful service. And as the coffin came out there was a pelican formation that flew overhead and that was his totem. And we didn't see any more pelicans that day. The symbolism it was just so powerful. There was some joyousness to see that happening.

So once the funeral directors got (my loved one) home, they put him on the back of an old work truck, and the kids put the flowers on there and the kids were part of the service and then afterwards, on the way down to the cemetery, the boys just turned up and started dancing, all painted up. So it was a lovely send off and then there was about a 30 second shower as we came out of the church, (chuckle) I thought, yeah, that was just his way of saying goodbye, like a sun shower I guess. Things work in funny ways.



Sorry Camps provide a meaningful way of saying goodbye in some communities:

Cultural practices is very important for me cause having the time to go back to my country and back on my land where I can grieve with family in that cultural setting which sometimes means going back to Sorry Camp and to be out there for a couple of days, to be able to have the opportunity to go back to country, to sit together in country and to spend that time grieving with our elders, the loss of loved ones, relatives. That process could take maybe up to a week and a half because there is always the support that we have to offer to the families that are grieving by organising funerals.

When they've done their ritual grieving out there (in the Sorry Camp) which is the right way but then they need their own space and that quiet time to be able to grieve back in the community in their own way so their body can heal.

Smoking Ceremonies provide solace and cleansing in some communities:

That family, grandparents and parents (are practising cultural ways of) working for health and wellbeing – revitalising culture – the whole family probably but (the mother) is the one that's going to do the women's smoking ceremony and (the father) does that with men.

Language learning provides reassurance and inspiration for some people in their grief:

Language helps us feel again. Language helps us look for and identify strong cultural areas in tuning in with our language and going to places that relate. And language is a very important thing to have and we can connect that back to places in particular where we go to.