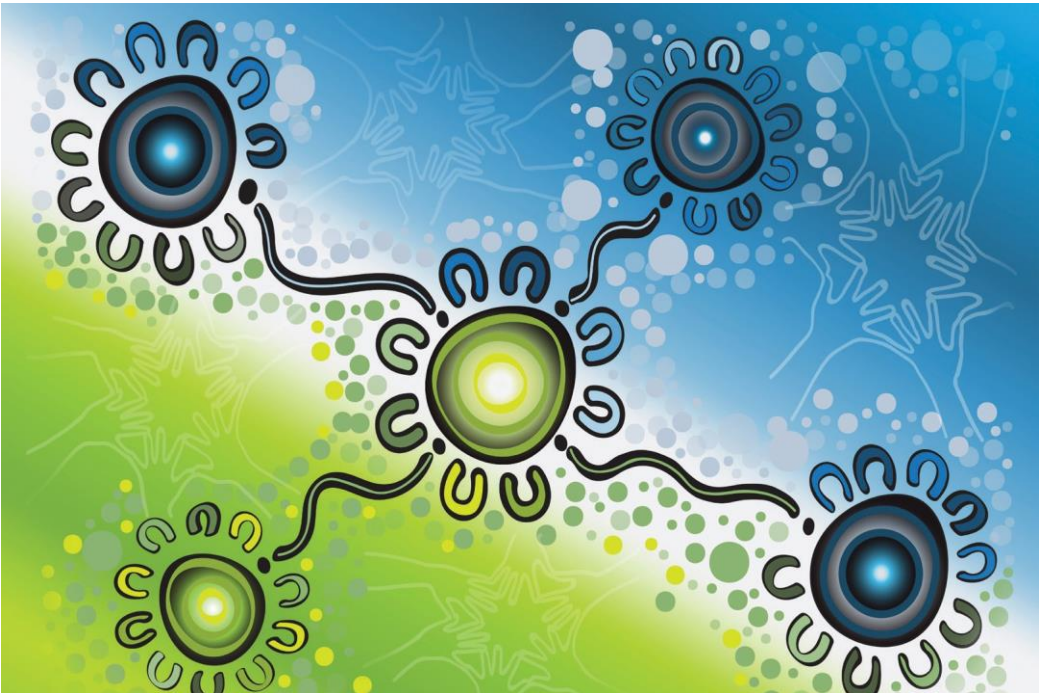




Aboriginal Health Council  
of South Australia Inc.

# Grief and Loss

Help for Aboriginal people  
going through grief



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Cover Artwork – Kokotinna Towilla by Allan Sumner

In the Kurna Language, Kokotinna means 'Healthy' and Towilla means 'Spirit'. This illustration recognises the importance of Aboriginal individuals, families, communities and health professionals coming together in the process to yarn, learn, heal and strengthen the inner-spirit from grief and loss. The joining of hands represents unity, strength and support.



## What is grief

Grief happens when we lose **someone or something** that is close to us.

Grief affects people, communities and families in many **different ways**.

Grief is **normal** and affects everyone at some time in his or her life.

Grief is not just to do with death. People can grieve for the loss of their culture, health, relationship, job or anything important to them.

Every person grieves **in his or her own way** and in their own time.

**Remember** it is normal and healthy to grieve.

It is important to **look after your mind, body and soul** when you are **grieving** and **healing**.



## How grief feels

Grief can bring a lot of **strong feelings**. There is no **right or wrong way to feel**. During a time of grief you might experience some of the following emotions:

- Sadness** You may be sad for family, sad for your loss or sad for the person who has passed.
- Shock** It can be hard to believe what has happened, especially if your loss was unexpected.
- Anger** You may be angry because the loss has happened, angry that you have lost someone or something so important.
- Hurt** Because what happened isn't fair.
- Loneliness** You may feel alone, like no one understands how you feel and there's no one there for you. You may feel lonely after losing someone you love.
- Fear** You may feel scared or afraid and you might not know why. Feeling panicky and anxious is normal.
- Emptiness** Feeling gutted, like there's nothing left, is normal. Or you might not really feel anything at all which can make you feel empty.



## Physical feelings

It is **normal** to feel **pain** or **discomfort** in your body when you are grieving. You may notice the following:

- Feeling **exhausted** and **really tired**.
- Feeling **heavy**, weighed down.
- Feeling **flat**, no energy.
- Chest pain, chest tightness, **heartache**.
- **Headaches** or sore eyes.
- Pain in your **back**, **neck** or **shoulders**.
- Ache in your guts, a **sick** stomach.

If these physical feelings are **really bothering you**, or **last a long time** you should visit your doctor.



## Behaviour

People act in all sorts of ways when they're grieving. **It's different for everyone.** It's good to be aware of changes in our behaviour when grieving. You might feel like you want to:

- Cry** Crying is common. Some people cry a lot, but other people might not cry at all.
- Sleep** Sleeping more than usual, or not being able to sleep much at all.
- Eat** Eating too much, or not eating enough.
- Drink** Drinking too much alcohol.
- Smoke** Having more smokes than usual.
- Use drugs** Smoking yarndi or using other drugs, except for prescription medications.
- Gamble** Gambling more than usual and more than you can afford.
- Be strong** For family and people around you. Taking care of others but not yourself.
- Be alone** Wanting to be alone, not spending as much time with family and friends, taking time off work.
- Don't want to be alone** Preferring to be close to people, and talking a lot.



## Coping and healing

It's important to **look after yourself** when you've lost someone or something. There are lots of things you can do to **begin healing**:

- **Give yourself time to heal.** Grieving takes time.
- Spend time with trusted family and friends for **yarning** or **just being there**.
- Listen to music, do some painting, writing or something you find **relaxing**.
- Practise **culture**.
- Visit your **country**.
- Talk to your **ancestors**.
- Eat healthy, exercise and get plenty of rest. Try to **keep healthy**.
- **Avoid** drinking, smoking or using drugs.
- Try **meditating** or **praying**.



## Kids grieve too

Times of grief can be **really hard for kids**. They can get **confused and scared** by what's happening around them. They might act differently and behave in the following ways:

- Wet the bed or not sleep as well at night.
- He or she may be **needy**, **sooky** and want to be **held more**.
- **Cry** a lot more than usual.

**Older kids are different** when they grieve too:

- He or she may start **acting up**, **getting into trouble**.
- They may be **angry** or **aggressive**.
- Want to be **left alone** or not want to talk.
- Start **drinking** or **using drugs**.





## What kids need

**Sorry Time** and times of grief are **hard for everyone**. It is important to consider the child's age, experience and what is right for the child's family. Some of these things can help kids **understand their feelings** and **help them heal**:

- To **be with** and talk to people they **know and trust**.
- To be given **time and permission** to grieve.
- To be **included** in ceremonies and allowed to go to funerals where appropriate. **Kids need to say goodbye too**.
- To **understand** what's happening – try to be **honest** with kids so they feel less confused and scared.
- To have plenty of **rest and eat healthy food** so they feel good physically.
- **Exercise** and spending time outdoors **are good ways** to clear the head.
- To **express their feelings and their grief**, maybe through practising **culture**, art, writing, music or dance.



## How to help someone through grief

During **Sorry Time** or when a person you know has had a loss, sometimes it can help to ask if they're okay. It's important to look after yourself and know your limits too. **If you feel up to it**, you can help someone by:

- Simply asking them **how they're going**.
- **Be there** for them and **listen** when they need to talk.
- **Ask** the person how you can help.
- Suggest they talk to someone who knows about grief and loss. Help them to find someone to talk to, but **only if they want to**.

It is **not helpful** to pressure people who are grieving:

- **Don't tell people how to feel**.  
Remember grief is different for everyone.
- **Don't tell people what they should do**.  
Different things work for different people.



## When to get help

Help is available if you need it. It's especially important to seek help if you, or someone who is grieving, start to experience the following:

- Acting **really different**.
- Being **aggressive or violent**, putting other people in danger.
- Feeling really **down**.
- Not looking after your **physical health**.
- Thinking or talking about **suicide, self-harm or hurting others**. Remember, **help is available** and you are **never alone**.
- When **drug and alcohol use** are starting to get too much.

If **someone you know** has shown **changes** like these, you could **encourage them** to seek help.



## Where to go for help

There are many people that might be able to help you or someone you know who is grieving and help to start the healing process. Some of these supports are:

- Social and Emotional Wellbeing Workers
- Aboriginal Health Workers
- Ngangkari or Traditional Healers
- Aboriginal Community Health Services in your area
- Community service organisations
- Your GP
- Counsellors or psychologists
- Your local church or place of worship
- Phone counselling services like [beyondblue](#) or [Kids Helpline](#)



## Contacts for more information

**Aboriginal Health Council  
of South Australia Inc.**  
[www.ahcsa.org.au](http://www.ahcsa.org.au)

**beyondblue**  
Tel 1300 224 236  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

**Lifeline**  
Tel 131 114  
[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**Kids Helpline**  
Tel 1800 551 800  
[www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

**MensLine**  
Tel 1300 789 978  
[www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)

**Suicide Call Back Service**  
Tel 1300 659 467  
[www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

**Australian Centre for  
Grief and Bereavement**  
Tel 1800 642 066  
[www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)

**Grieflink**  
[www.grieflink.asn.au](http://www.grieflink.asn.au)

**Healing Foundation**  
[www.healingfoundation.org.au](http://www.healingfoundation.org.au)

**Australian Indigenous  
HealthInfoNet**  
[www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au)



## Acknowledgements

*The Rising Spirits Community Resilience Project* would like to thank the many people who donated their time, expertise and stories to the Rising Spirits Project. Thanks to all who contributed their feedback during the development and consultation of this resource.

Contacts updated last: July 2015



Disclaimer: This booklet was developed by the Rising Spirits Community Resilience Research Project of the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia in partnership with the South Australian Health & Medical Research Institute and the University of South Australia. The Rising Spirits Community Resilience Research Project was funded by beyondblue. It was the intention of the Rising Spirits Community Resilience Research Project's Aboriginal Advisory Group that this booklet is handed back to the Aboriginal community of South Australia for their use. The Rising Spirits Community Resilience Research Project seeks to honour the spirit of this intention and has made reasonable efforts to ensure that material contained in this booklet was correct at the time of publication, but makes no warranty and accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the material. External links are provided as a service to booklet users but the Rising Spirits Community Resilience Research Project does not accept responsibility for or endorse the content or condition of any linked site.

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