

Grieving the Aboriginal Way

When You're Grieving

When someone you love has passed on you will be feeling a lot of different emotions. It is also true that for Aboriginal people, there are some different things that you need to do with your people and community to help you with these feelings. This fact sheet is to help you to understand these things. It will also explain the difference between 'normal' grieving, and when you need to get some help with your grief.

When you first lose someone there are some common feelings that people will go through as they try to come to terms with their loss. These feelings may also be different depending on how the person has died. It is normal to feel like this. Some of the things you might be feeling are:

- Numb – you will be in shock. This means that you find it hard to believe that the person has died. You will expect to see them in their usual places; you might talk about them like they are still alive.
- Pretty sad, maybe even depressed. When you lose someone, you will miss them a lot and probably be crying heaps for them. If you feel like crying, then you should. It's a good idea to let it out or you can feel even worse.
- Angry – at yourself, or at someone else. Sometimes we want to blame someone for our loss.
- Longing for country or home. You may feel like you need to go home to do your grieving.
- You might spend a lot of time thinking about things you should or shouldn't have done. Many people believe that they have done something wrong to cause the person's death. Sometimes 'Aboriginal Way' the person's death may be seen as 'payback' for wrongdoing. If you feel this way, you need to talk with an Aboriginal Health Worker who can listen to you, or help you to talk to your elders about this.

Leprena is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Christian Congress located in Glenorchy. Leprena performs many funerals within the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community. Leprena also offers bereavement support and other support for grieving families.

Suicide of a Loved One

If the person has died by taking their own life there are some different feelings and emotions you may be experiencing.

You may have a lot of questions which make your healing harder. Some common questions people ask themselves are: 'Why didn't he/she say something?'; 'Why didn't I see the signs?'; 'Why did they die alone?'; 'Why did they kill themselves?'

You should talk about these things with professional people who work with suicide and understand the issues. At this time, people who were close to the deceased person may also be having some thoughts of suicide. Get help for you and others who have been affected by the suicide.

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During Sorry and Funeral Time

Family will go through some traditions during the funeral and sorry time. These traditions are done to make sure that the person's spirit is shown respect and can find peace.

It is not unusual for the spirit of the deceased person to 'visit' many Aboriginal people. This is very much a part of culture, and you should not be scared. Sometimes, your loved one may just want to let you know that they are okay, or want to 'watch over you'.

You might feel a 'bit shame' or even frightened about this, and may not want to tell anyone, but this is a very common thing for many Aboriginal people to experience.

After the Funeral and Sorry Time is Over

This is the hardest time, and you will probably feel very sad because everyone will leave and go back home, or you will have to go back to your home. Make sure that you have people around you and can talk when you need to. You should keep talking about your loved one and especially the good memories you have. Don't be afraid to talk about your loved one, it is very important not to forget them. Remember, everyone else is probably feeling the same way, and it also helps them to be able to talk.

How Long Will I Grieve For My Loved One?

You will always feel a sense of loss when you lose someone you love. In time you will think about it less often, and probably be able to have good memories of the person you have lost, instead of just remembering their death. Remember, that everyone grieves in their own way, and take different amounts of time to come to terms with their loss. Don't let anyone tell you how long you should be sad for. Listen to your heart, and you will know when your grief is getting better.

What Sort of Things Tell Me I'm Not Coping

Feeling numb, shocked, sad, angry, guilty are all normal. But if you are feeling all of these things for a longer time than your other relations, or friends of your loved one, you may not be coping well with our loss.

You might find that your friends or relations seem to be getting on with their lives and you are not. You might still believe that your loved one is not really dead, and will come back to you.

You might start wanting to be alone more and feel like "no-one understands you".

You might blame yourself somehow, for the death of your loved one. Sometimes people look to find reasons for a person's death. If it is believed that someone is to blame, they may be 'paid back' for the wrongdoing. If you feel that this is happening to you, then you need to talk with one of your elders about this. An Aboriginal Health Worker, or someone strong in your community will be able to help you with this as well.

You might also start drinking on a bit more than usual. Some people might also use other drugs, thinking it might help them to cope with the pain.

Other people start picking arguments with their friends and relations for no reasons. You might get moody and snap at people for no reason.

You may have bad dreams; find it hard to sleep, or keep seeing the dead person's spirit. If this makes you feel scared or upset, then this is also not good.

Thoughts of suicide

Unfortunately, for some people, they feel like they don't want to go on living without their loved one. We call this, thoughts about suicide, and some people may also try to end their life.

If you have any thoughts of wanting to die you must talk to someone straight away.

Don't feel shame about this. It is better to talk to someone than do something that will cause your family more pain and grief. Use the numbers at the end of this booklet or go and talk to someone you can trust. They can help!

If you notice any of these things happening to you, then you need to have a yarn with someone like a doctor or health worker.

You shouldn't feel shame about talking with someone – they have spoken to lots of people about these sorts of things before, so they won't think you are 'silly' for feeling this way.

Talk to your family – they might also be feeling the same way but might also feel 'shame way' about telling anyone.

Maybe, you can yarn with someone together.

If you think that you aren't coping with losing your loved one, you can talk to someone at your nearest Aboriginal Health Service, or a doctor, nurse, health worker, psychologist or counsellor.

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