

# Tips for Careworkers: Grief and Loss among Older People, Families and Residents



**What it is:** Grief is a response to loss. It can affect all parts of a person's life.

Bereavement is the time of grief experienced by people following the death of someone close to them.

**Why it matters:** Grief and loss are common among people who receive care and their families. For people with palliative care needs or approaching the end of life, there may be more than one trigger for grief. Older people may be able to deal with grief, but signs of intense or ongoing grief should be reported.

Feelings of grief and loss can have a great affect on a person's physical health and mental wellbeing. Careworkers are likely to notice signs of grief in the people they care for. Cultural differences in grief should be respected.

**What I need to know:** Older people and their families may experience grief and loss due to the death of relatives or the death of friends or fellow residents. Family includes people (and pets) identified by the person as family.

Older people can also experience grief because of loss of independence (need for help from others), or not being able to do things that they once enjoyed.

Signs of grief in older people include:

- crying or finding it hard to talk of their sadness
- anger, anxiety or worry
- a change in eating habits
- losing interest in family, friends, or hobbies
- finding it hard to sleep, concentrate, or make decisions.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Offer the person and their family a chance to talk. For some people talking with a GP, counsellor, or pastoral care worker may help.

**Note** The person may not need answers or advice; listening to him or her may give the greatest comfort.

**Do** Let the older person know that grieving is a natural response to loss.

**Do** Spend time with the person in a gentle and unhurried way. Use phrases such as "I'm awfully sorry for your loss" and then take time to listen to their response.

**Name:**

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## My reflections:

What are some of the reasons for which an older person may grieve?

What is one thing I can do to help an older person with grief?

## My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice  
Tip Sheets:  
Grief and Loss among Staff  
Spiritual Care  
Talking about Dying

References used to develop this sheet are available at  
[www.palliaged.com.au](http://www.palliaged.com.au)