

Grief, Loss and Recovery

A bushfire has the power to affect many people who were never even in the vicinity of the fires. Some people will experience it painfully and directly through personal loss or through someone they knew. Others may be sensitive to the relentless media coverage and find themselves becoming anxious about things that may have nothing to do with them directly or the events themselves.

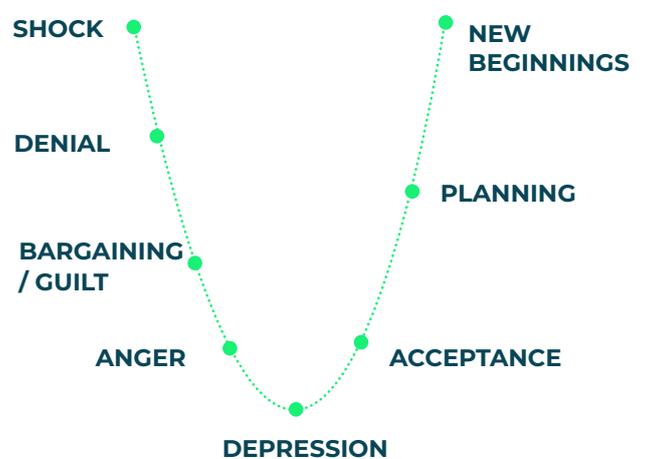
WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT GRIEF

People experience grief in different ways. It is not necessarily a linear process. Some people may go back and forth feeling okay one day and utterly despairing the next. Individuals experiencing grief will criss-cross the spectrum of emotions as they work through the grief process. Many people struggle and progress and regress many times over as they work through the process. It is important to acknowledge the individuality of each grieving person and to be careful not to impose your expectations of grieving on others. This isn't the time to say "When my dad died..."

That's why one of the most important things you can do is LISTEN.

- Recognise that loss raises all sorts of feelings, and that even if unasked, people need your support and understanding, even if you think you're doing nothing but sitting with them.
- Reality takes time. The process of recovery is linked directly to acceptance of the loss. Acceptance will not come until reality is faced.
- Emotional release is not easy for everyone. Grieving people should be allowed to express their feelings. This may mean unfamiliar tears for some who are trying to remain 'strong' but they need to be reassured that it is normal to feel this way and express emotions openly.
- Re-establishing the 'self' after loss is a roller coaster ride. Some people may surprise you and look fine but beneath their 'I'm ok' exterior, lies a lot of pain that may still be yet to surface, so be aware of this.

GRIEF AND LOSS CURVE



HOW TO HELP SOMEONE GOING THROUGH GRIEF

Here are some of the most common reactions to grief and ways you can respond:

Shock and Denial

Thoughts spinning out of control. Allows traumatic information to filter in but cannot process it. This is much worse now that news is 24/7 and on hand-held devices. They may seem stunned or startled.

Supportive behaviour:

- Accept feelings of helplessness.
- Gently reassure. Try using body language and nodding or just taking their hand if they lean towards you. Talk is not always needed.
- Listen without judging.



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Disorientation

Confused in relation to time, place and person. May not remember what is happening, Unusually befuddled.

Supportive behaviour:

- Expect that more time may be required and be patient, don't rush them.
- If you work with them, allow for errors and accept 'muddle-headedness'.
- Provide an environment where it is permissible for them to share their feelings or concerns.

Depression

Usually occurs weeks after the event, but signifies that finality is sinking in. They are listless, disinterested, may sleep a great deal, have no interest in seeing others. Have lost any sense of purpose in life.

Supportive behaviour:

- Check that they have effective ongoing social support and check in with them regularly.
- If no obvious social support, actively encourage professional support.

Beginning to Reorganise

A sense of logic and an ability to make plans for the future appears. Difficulties are much more of a functional nature. May see reappearance of guilt or anger, but this will generally pass.

Supportive behaviour:

- Watch, check in and try not to get frustrated when they backslide. As we said earlier this process of recovery is not linear.

If you feel you would benefit from further support consider contacting our friendly team on **1300 687 327** to learn more about how we can help.

ASSISTING OTHERS THROUGH THE GRIEF PROCESS

- Listen to the person (allow the person to vent without interruption, remain calm, speak in a firm and low voice).
- Be aware of your own feelings, and manage them appropriately.
- Acknowledge the person's problem or situation (use empathy appropriately, acknowledge emotions, acknowledge their point of view).
- Advise and explain the options available.
- Try to involve them in deciding what option to take.
- Confirm what actions have been agreed, or what actions will be taken.

ADDITIONAL DOS AND DON'TS

These are simply some practical suggestions that maybe appropriate in many situations:

- DO be friendly and compassionate, even if people are being difficult.
- DO listen and hear what is being said.
- DO acknowledge that each person's experience of grief and loss will be unique.
- DO remember that nobody has to justify their feelings to you.
- DO realise the person has suffered a loss, even if you don't perceive it as such.
- DON'T prevent the person from expressing their guilt or anger if they need to.
- DO remember that many who give support immediately after a trauma may be delayed in working through their own grief.
- DON'T personalise knock-backs to your efforts to assist.
- DO encourage those who hold a common response to support one another if they can.



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