

What is bereavement counselling?

Bereavement counselling is a confidential discussion about the impact of your loss. It can assist you with expressing your grief, understanding your needs, identifying your own strengths and ways of coping and adjusting to a changed life.

Not everyone wants or needs bereavement counselling. Counselling is offered according to the needs of each individual person.

A bereavement counsellor:

- Will listen and learn about your experience of grief.
- Will support you as you navigate your grief in your own way.
- Will provide information and strategies that might be helpful.
- Won't tell you how you should or shouldn't feel, react or behave.
- Won't need to be protected from your pain.

Western Sydney Local Health District Bereavement Service

The WSLHD Bereavement Service provides:

- bereavement counselling
- linkage with other forms of support (e.g. support groups)
- information, resources and referral.

Who can access the service?

Family members and friends bereaved due to the death of someone known to Western Sydney Local Health District (i.e. in hospital or under community health within Auburn, Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Holroyd & Parramatta local government areas).

What does it cost?

The service is **free**.

Where can I go for counselling and support?

Bereavement counselling is offered at several sites within Western Sydney (e.g. Mt Druitt, Blacktown, Westmead), and also via telehealth (virtual) and telephone sessions. Other support is also available – please contact the Western Sydney Local Health District Bereavement Service for details.

How can I access the service?

Inquiries and appointments can be made by **phone or email**, Monday to Friday between 8.00am to 5.00pm:

P: 9881 1723

E: WSLHD-BereavementCounselling@health.nsw.gov.au

*A free, confidential Health Care Interpreter Service is available. Ask staff to arrange an interpreter for you.
AUSLAN interpreters are also available.*

24 hour telephone support

Lifeline	13 11 14
Beyond Blue	1300 224 636
Mensline	1300 789 978
Mental Health Access Line	1800 011 511
Kids Help Line	1800 551 800



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What is grief?

Grief includes all of the responses we may experience when facing any kind of loss.

Bereavement is the experience of loss following a death.

The range of reactions that can be experienced after someone has died may feel overwhelming and unfamiliar. Often people feel isolated or that no one understands what they are going through. Things can seem chaotic and sometimes there is a sense of feeling 'out of control.' However, these are usually natural responses when trying to process the impact of a death and relationship.

Some common grief responses

While grief is different for everyone, there are some things you may be likely to experience.

These might include:

- **Feelings** – shock, anger, numbness, sadness, fear, anxiety, loneliness, guilt and relief.
- **Thoughts** – confusion, dreams, doubts, disbelief, wondering 'what if?', 'why?', forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating and making decisions.
- **Behaviours** – lethargy or overactivity, restlessness, lack of self-care, lack of motivation, feeling irritable.

- **Physical responses** – tiredness, loss of appetite, sleeplessness or sleeping a lot, tension in different parts of the body, gastro-intestinal upsets.
- **Social responses** – withdrawal from others, changes in relationships with others.
- **Spiritual responses** – questioning the purpose or meaning of life, loss of faith, questioning religious beliefs or experiencing a sense of the presence of the person who died.

Grief is unique for each person, so you may only experience some of these responses. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. There is also no set pattern and the timing of grief is different for everyone. People often talk about grief coming in waves – fairly constant and intense at first, but with periods of relief becoming longer over time. Some days you may feel like you just 'exist', until gradually you may realise your grief has changed, and you are able to hold the grief differently. Certain days, such as anniversaries or birthdays, or celebrations such as marriages or births, may also be especially difficult.

What can help

- Finding a balance between spending time alone and being with family and friends.
- Being patient – not expecting too much of yourself.
- Trusting yourself to know what you need and doing what is right for you.

- If possible, not making important decisions too soon.
- Choosing a good listener if you need to talk about how you're feeling.
- Looking after yourself physically – trying to eat and sleep well, exercising.
- Spending time doing things you enjoy and that provide distraction e.g. gardening, time with pets

Children and Young People

When children and young people are impacted by a death, this needs to be recognised. Even very young children experience grief and may need a chance to explore their feelings. There are some useful resources available for people supporting bereaved children – please contact the bereavement service for more information.

When can bereavement counselling help?

Counselling may be helpful if:

- You feel stuck in your grief, or your grief feels like it is getting worse with time.
- Your relationships with others seem to be affected in negative ways.
- You feel that there is no one else you can talk to about what you are going through.
- You have distressing memories that persist about the illness or death.
- There are other difficult issues related to the death that you would like to explore with someone neutral.