

## Responses to grief

The following may be responses to grief and can come and go over time:

### Physical

- Tiredness or exhaustion
- Palpitations
- Aches and pains
- Changes in appetite
- Worsening of pre-existing health conditions
- Disturbed sleep

### Emotional

- Confusion or disorganisation
- Disinterest or reduced concentration
- Mood swings
- Despair or helplessness
- Denial
- Guilt or blame
- Relief
- Anger or aggression
- Risk-taking

### Social

- Loss or change of role
- Relationships may become strained
- Loss of confidence or withdrawal
- Difficulty in socialising or knowing what to say
- Some friends may avoid you
- New people may become important to you due to their ability to understand

### Spiritual

- Questioning your beliefs
- Deriving great strength from your beliefs
- Looking to a faith for support
- Anger with beliefs – why did this happen?
- Having visions of the deceased

### Growing with grief

Some people never stop missing a loved one. The pain may gradually decrease and allow the person to live with the loss. Special days like birthdays, Christmas or anniversaries can be challenging for many years. Grief and past losses may be revisited, and this is normal.

### About Calvary

Founded in 1885 by the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary, Calvary is a charitable, not-for-profit, Catholic health care organisation. Our mission is to provide quality, compassionate health care to the most vulnerable, including those reaching the end of their life. With over 18,000 staff and volunteers, we have a national network of 14 Public and Private Hospitals, 72 Residential Care and Retirement Communities and 19 Community Care service centres.

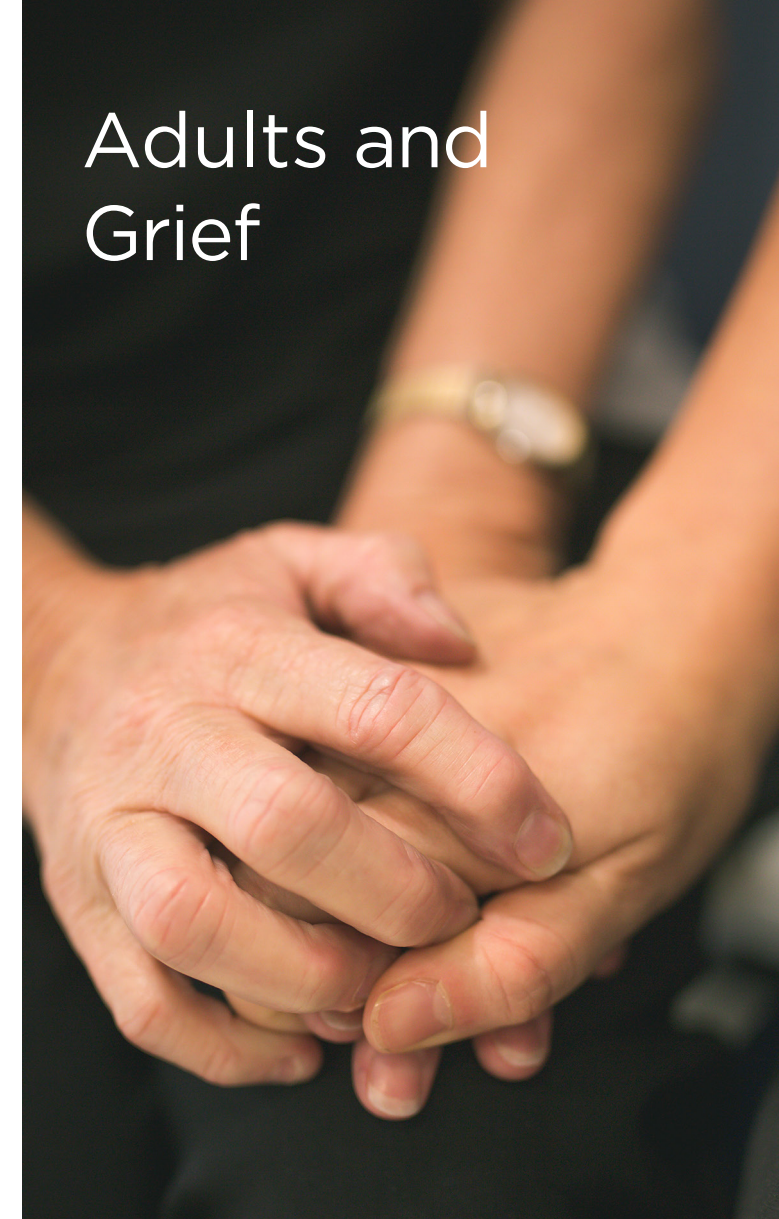


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# Adults and Grief



Calvary

Mater Newcastle

Continuing the Mission of the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary

Calvary Mater Newcastle is a public hospital and a major cancer care centre within the Hunter New England Local Health District network.

## Grief

Grief is a normal reaction to loss. Loss may be the result of death, but also loss of health, a relationship, employment, home or pets.

Grieving is a process that may take a very long time and cannot be hurried. Each person will express their grief in their own way and this may be influenced by their age, gender, beliefs, culture and past experiences.

The intensity of grief may be affected by the value and/or circumstances of the loss. Other family members and friends may also grieve for the same loss. Their reactions may all be different. It is not helpful to compare grief reactions.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Most people's grief can be managed with appropriate family, community and cultural support.

Nothing can prepare us for how we respond to grief.

## Young adults

Some people may make the mistake that young people have adult ways of coping, since they look like adults. Young people can often give the impression that they are doing better than they are.

## Self help tips

- Don't push yourself to do more than you can. Save your energy for what is important.
- Accept help and support.
- Recognise your own needs and give yourself permission to meet them.
- Take time out.
- Don't expect yourself to be as efficient or as capable as you were before.
- Talk about your loss with a support person. Understand that it is not your responsibility to help others to cope with your grief.
- Pick up your social life in your own time.
- Try to avoid making major decisions or changes.
- Seek some spiritual guidance if you need to.
- Don't be distressed by any visions or sounds in the early stage of loss.
- Seek comfort in rituals and memorials.
- Take care of your own health - see your doctor.

## Tips for helpers

- It's ok when you don't know what to say. Give reassurance and encourage the person to look after themselves.
- Don't expect them to "get over it".
- Offer practical help (e.g. cooking, cleaning, etc).
- Avoid taking control away from the person.
- Try not to give advice or expect the person to make the best decisions at this time.
- Listen without judging.
- Ask what will help.
- Help the person to remember the funny, happy and ordinary times as well.
- Don't expect the person to support you.
- Support them to seek the help they need.
- Make offers for social activity but also allow the person to decline.
- Respect their beliefs and any changes that their loss may bring.