

Grief and Bereavement: Practice Tips for Care Workers



How should I offer support before and after a death?

1. Be aware that losses related to a death, and other forms of loss (for example changes in health, loss of control, loss of independence, loss of role) can have a huge impact. These losses can change the ways that older people and family members may interact with you. See the **ELDAC Core Concepts for Care Workers** for more information about types of loss.
2. Explore grief with thoughtful questions and comments, even though it can be hard to be with someone who is grieving:
 - Use active, empathic listening¹ which often involves inviting people to share difficult feelings. For example, "Can you tell me what this has been like for you?" or "How are you doing today?" Use words to reflect what you are hearing. For example, "It sounds like you're feeling very lonely today."
 - Try not to give advice or problem-solve. Often people simply wish to feel heard and understood.
 - Identify and name responses to grief. For example, "I can imagine this makes you feel very sad."
 - Be open to the different ways people might cope with loss, as there is no one 'right' way of coping.
 - Avoid comments such as "I know how you feel," or "I know what you are going through." Each person's experience will be unique.
 - Be aware that people may also hold cultural and spiritual views about death and grief that are different to yours. Be open to asking about their values and beliefs, and forms of support or practices that they may find most helpful.
 - Avoid clichés or statements that downplay loss. For example, "Time heals all wounds," or "Everything happens for a reason," or "At least they are not in pain anymore."
3. Remember that positive experiences of end-of-life care may reduce the risk of poor outcomes in bereavement.² You can support quality end-of-life care in many ways (for example inviting family and carers to be involved in care, asking about important cultural or spiritual beliefs and practices).
4. Offer support when someone has experienced a death (whether the death happened recently, or a long time ago). This might include talking about their relationship with the person who died, or inviting them to share memories and about this person.¹ For example, you might gently ask, "Can you tell me a little about [name]? What did [name] mean to you?"

How can I share information about dying, grief and bereavement?

1. Offer simple information about the dying process, end of life, grief and bereavement. This can help people to understand how they react to grief, or to prepare for a death^{3, 4, 5} (e.g. [Understanding grief by Palliative Care Australia](#)). Be aware that some people will need to revisit this sort of information over time.
2. Be aware of common responses to grief and bereavement (see the **ELDAC Core Concepts for Care Workers**). Use this knowledge to reassure people about normal responses to loss.
3. Offer culturally appropriate information about grief.^{1, 4, 5} For example, [Coping with Grief](#) (Griefline) is a brief fact sheet about grief and coping tips. (This resource is available in English, Arabic, Greek, Spanish, Vietnamese and Chinese).

How can I help people to connect with their own social supports when they are grieving?

1. Encourage older people, family and carers to connect with their natural support networks for emotional and practical support with grief (e.g. family, friends, support groups).¹
2. Encourage carers to take steps to look after their own wellbeing. This might include spending time with family or friends, and doing things that are meaningful (over time, as well as after a death).
3. Recognise there are different spiritual and religious beliefs and views on dying and grief. Try to learn about the beliefs, views and supports that are important to each older person and their family.

What should I do when I identify people who may need extra support?

1. Be aware that some older people, family or carers are more likely to have difficulties with grief and bereavement (e.g. mental health concerns, including Prolonged Grief Disorder).
 - Review the summary of risk and protective factors (See the **ELDAC Core Concepts for Care Workers**).
2. Seek advice and discuss any concerns about the grief of older people, family and carers with senior members of your team (e.g. supervisor, manager) as needed.
 - When grief doesn't go away by CarerHelp is a brief resource that can be shared with bereaved carers. It describes some of the signs that someone may need professional support. (For example, feelings and responses that persist over time; such as a loss of purpose, intense and painful longing for someone who has died, finding it hard to engage in day-to-day tasks, and withdrawing from others).
3. Share information about support that all older people, family and carers can access, such as:
 - The **CarerHelp Grief & Loss page** which lists resources and support.
 - **Griefline** (Ph: 1300 845 745, 8am-8pm, 7 days a week) provide grief and loss support, including bereavement counselling, support groups and online forums. There is telephone support for people who do not speak English (a callback via an interpreter can be requested).
 - **Grief Australia** offer a helpful list of telephone supports.
 - **13YARN** (Ph: 13 92 76) is a general Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support line that is available 24 hours, 7 days a week.

References

1. Meichsner F, O'Connor M, Skritskaya N, Shear MK. Grief Before and After Bereavement in the Elderly: An Approach to Care. *Am J Geriatr Psychiatry*. 2020;28(5):560-9.
2. Wright AA, Keating NL, Balboni TA, Matulonis UA, Block SD, Prigerson HG. Place of Death: Correlations With Quality of Life of Patients With Cancer and Predictors of Bereaved Caregivers' Mental Health. *J Clin Oncol*. 2010;28(29):4457-64.
3. Vandersman P, Chakraborty A, Rowley G, Tieman J. The matter of grief, loss and bereavement in families of those living and dying in residential aged care setting: A systematic review. *Arch Gerontol Geriatr*. 2024;124:105473.
4. Palliative Care Australia. National Palliative Care Standards for All Health Professionals and Aged Care Services. Palliative Care Australia. 2022. [cited 4 April 2025].
5. Department of Health and Aged Care. Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards. Australian Government. February 2025 [cited 4 Apr 2025].