



The Rosemary Branch

Winter 2013

australian centre
for **grief** and
bereavement

“The body and mind are connected... it's not just our mind that grieves, but our entire self”

Michal deWilloughby,
Senior Bereavement Counsellor,
Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

Grief and the Body

We know that grief affects our emotions, but what many aren't aware of is that grief can also have a big impact on our physical health and wellbeing. Indeed, people who are grieving often experience physical symptoms and ill health, both in the immediacy of bereavement and over time.

‘The body and mind are connected, and when we grieve it's not just our mind that grieves, but our entire self,’ says Michal deWilloughby, Senior Bereavement Counsellor at the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement. ‘In fact, often our body remembers; responding to grief triggers when it seems that our brain does not.’

It's common and very normal to experience a variety of physical symptoms after the death of a loved one. This article looks at some of these symptoms, and provides

information and tips around identifying and managing your health and wellbeing at this time.

Your energy needs

When grieving, our body requires and uses greater amounts of energy. Things that were basic and everyday before, e.g. eating, sleeping and exercising, become increasingly important; but at the same time, feel much harder to achieve.

When grieving it may help to modify or adapt your usual patterns and routines in order to get the energy your body requires. For example, it might be easier for you to eat small meals at regular intervals, rather than have three large ones each day; you may need to take a short nap during the day; or you might find it more practical to go for a walk instead of going to the gym or doing more high-impact activities.

Common physical responses

Responses may include:

- physical exhaustion
- sleeping difficulties
- crying
- feelings of heaviness and numbness
- dietary problems and stomach upsets
- weakened immune system
- aches and pains
- heart palpitations
- loss of appetite
- headaches
- high blood pressure
- shortness of breath
- disrupted menstruation
- restlessness and agitation
- weight loss or gain
- skin conditions
- flare-ups of existing conditions

Grief and sleep

It is normal and extremely common for sleeping patterns to be disturbed when grieving, particularly if the death was traumatic or disturbing. Insomnia (being unable to sleep) is particularly common following bereavement, and for some, can turn into a longer-term problem. 'Insomnia can affect your concentration, memory, mood and ability to cope; and can also increase your risk of accidents or injury,' says Michal, 'so it is important to take steps to help manage the issue, or to seek help if needed.'

Tips for managing insomnia

- Avoid stimulants such as tea, coffee, tobacco and caffeinated drinks before bed.
- If you can't sleep, get up and do something else until you feel sleepy again.
- Do something relaxing before bed, e.g. take a warm bath, listen to music.
- Minimise stress and anxiety where possible — writing things down, journaling or talking to someone can be helpful.
- If considering natural and/or over-the-counter remedies, seek advice from a pharmacist or health professional before using them.
- The idea of 'a good night's sleep', will differ widely from person to person. Try to stop expecting a specific amount of sleep each night — it's OK to fall short of the ideal.
- If you are experiencing trauma-related sleep disturbances, e.g. flashbacks or nightmares, it may be helpful to discuss this further with a counsellor, psychologist or other health professional.

Grief responses or everyday responses: How do I tell the difference?

It's easy to confuse one's grief with other normal life events — especially in the long term. Grief can sometimes act like a cloud or fog that disguises other issues, and it can be difficult to figure out what's what.

For example, women who experience grief around the time of menopause may find it difficult to differentiate between

grief responses and normal menopausal responses. It's important to stop yourself and ask: *Is the way I'm feeling related to my loss, or is it something else?* If you are unsure, it may be helpful to talk to friends, family, your GP, health professional, or a counsellor.

Looking after yourself

Self-care is essential when grieving, particularly in the long term. When we are experiencing grief, or supporting someone who is grieving, it can be all too easy to neglect both our physical and emotional health and wellbeing. Taking the time to look after yourself, however, can make a big difference in your ability to function on a day-to-day basis.

Tips around self-care

Self-care may take the form of:

- rest and relaxation, e.g. sleep, massage, meditation
- physical activity, e.g. walking, cycling, gardening
- eating a healthy and balanced diet
- social interaction, e.g. engaging with friends, family, colleagues, local community
- talking about your grief, e.g. with family, friends, a counsellor or other health professional
- putting yourself first — this is one instance where making yourself a priority is important
- doing activities that bring you pleasure, e.g. hobbies, music, reading, going to the movies
- asking for help — don't be afraid or ashamed to seek help if you need it.

Seeking help

'Grief can be a difficult, tiring and confusing experience to navigate,' says Michal. 'Although it is normal to experience physical symptoms whilst grieving, if you are concerned by any of the symptoms you experience along the way, don't be afraid to seek advice from your GP or health practitioner.'



For more information on grief resources and support services, please contact the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement on (03) 9265 2100 or go to www.grief.org.au

Common Questions Around Physical Responses and Grief



Since my partner died, I've lost a lot of weight. My family is concerned, but I just have no appetite and when I do eat, I get stomach pains and feel sick. Is this normal?

Both weight loss and weight gain can often occur following bereavement, and the symptoms you are describing are actually quite common. Try not to be over-ambitious when it comes to your eating habits at this time. Instead of eating three meals a day, try eating small, regular meals instead. It may also help to find foods that you can graze on that won't upset your stomach, e.g. fruit, yoghurt, liquid supplements, nuts or soup. With time, your appetite should return; however, if you are concerned, it may help to seek the advice of a nutritionist or health practitioner.



My counsellor told me that doing exercise is helpful when grieving, but I'm not a fit person, and would feel embarrassed joining a gym or sports club. Are there other ways I can exercise more privately?

When grieving, it can be beneficial to engage in physical activity as a way of releasing tension, lifting mood and distracting yourself from the intensity of your grief. You don't need to be a serious athlete to experience the benefits. Try to incorporate some physical activity into your daily routine. Why not start by going for a 30-minute walk in your local area? Or, if you'd prefer to stay closer home, try gardening, mowing the lawn, vacuuming, cleaning the house, playing with your children/grandchildren/nephews/nieces, or even dancing around the house to your favourite music.

Letter from the Director



Welcome to the Winter 2013 edition of *The Rosemary Branch*.

In this edition, our feature article looks at how grief can affect our body. There is no question that bereaved people can experience high levels of physical illness. The bereaved tend to visit doctors more frequently, use more medication, are hospitalised more often and have more days off work due to illness. It is important that we recognise the impact grief has on our bodies and how we can take care of ourselves during difficult times.

Also in this edition, we've included two new 'Your Stories' contributions, information on a new therapeutic bereavement support group commencing in July, and a number of resources that are available for purchase here at the Centre.

If you would like to add or remove yourself from our mailing list, please email newsletters@grief.org.au or call (03) 9265 2100. If you would prefer to receive *The Rosemary Branch* via email, please remove yourself from our mailing list, then visit our website www.grief.org.au and click the Mailing List icon, to sign up.

Kind regards,

Chris Hall

Director,
Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

In this edition:

- Grief and the Body
- Therapeutic Bereavement Support Group
- Your Stories contributions
- Featured grief resources

ACGB support groups

Support groups are a way of bringing people together in a safe space to share common life experiences. This column looks at the range of bereavement support groups offered by the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, and how you might become involved.



Therapeutic Bereavement Support Group

This Bereavement Support Group is for anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one.

Bereavement support groups are a way of bringing people together in a safe space to share their common experience of bereavement. They provide a forum for participants to communicate in a mutual understanding of shared challenges and problems.

Commencing in July 2013, the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement will be commencing a Therapeutic Bereavement Support Group in Mulgrave, Victoria. This will be a closed group of 8-10 sessions, held fortnightly until it ends. Closed groups are designed for a limited number of people who agree to be present at all scheduled sessions.

"The strength of closed groups is that participants will get to know one another better and develop deeper relationships" says group facilitator Elizabeth Beyer. "Deeper relationships and shared experience of grief provide opportunity for participants to impart their stories and assist each other."

This group will be focused towards participants who are looking for a group that follows a program. It includes creative and psycho-educational activities.



To register your interest, or for further information about the Therapeutic Bereavement Support Group (or other ACGB support groups) call (03) 9265 2100 or email support@grief.org.au

"Deeper relationships and shared experience of grief provide opportunity for participants to impart their stories and assist each other."

— Elizabeth Beyer
Group Facilitator



Your Stories

Could Bear No More

Anonymous

It's gone over the one year now that I lost my sister
the worst way how, she took her life one fatal night
and ever since then things haven't been right

I've grappled and battled with what is this grief
and what it means to be left behind bereaved

It hasn't been easy and it hasn't been fair
and I've had to work hard at my grief to bear

It's brought so much sadness and brought so much pain
that I can't say from her loss there's been any gain

But I'm no longer who I was before,
I'm different today I'm so much more

I've faced some demons and tackled them head on
all the while knowing they've made me more strong

But none of this ever did I ask for,
I never asked for this grief to walk through my door

And yet it entered in the strongest way
and it's impacted on my life ever since that day

I never asked for it to be a part of my life
I never thought I could bare all this pain and this strife

But what it must've been for my only sister Nat;
too painful to live, how to comprehend that

And so she decided her own way out
and all I wanted to do was to scream and to shout

Why didn't she give her life a genuine chance
why couldn't she have taken a real second glance?

Surely her life must've still been worth living
or perhaps maybe not as she was tired of giving

Giving in to the mental health that took her away
she was never the same girl from that day

The period of time when the mental health sank in
I could see my little sister before my eyes vanishing

Consumed by a world I could not understand
robbed of a life that could've been grand

My sister was amazing with so much strength
how she battled with her demons for such a length

It amazes me now for never before did I see
just how strong my sister would be

To battle for as long and as hard as she did
when she was merely back then only just a kid

23 years old when she said goodbye
and I still grapple with why so young she had to die

She was a mother, a daughter, a beautiful girl
and it's so sad how this world's lost such a rare pearl

Someone who truly could've achieved so much
why for her did this seem just so far out of touch

And what I would give for the chance now to say
that I want you around and I need you to stay

You are so much more than what it is you see;
you have the potential to be who you want to be

But maybe pain free and without any sorrow
that was Nat's only desire for tomorrow

And so she decided to say her goodbye,
over grappling with this life she perhaps choose to die

And yet we are left now with so much pain,
the loss of our loved one our greatest strain

For it isn't fair and it isn't right
to lose someone you love to this thief in the night

Why must suicide be the only way
for someone who can't stand to see another day?

Surely there must be some other way
can't we still spare someone's life today

But for what it's worth for my sister now she escaped the
pain and sorrow but how, by saying goodbye and taking an
act that was sadly never going to be bringing her back

And we are now left with only the remains
and all of the pieces that cause us such strains

We miss her now and we missed her then
and we wait for a time when we'll see her again

When we return to our final resting place
that's when I know we'll again see her face

But this time then it'll be different than before with the pain and
the hurt's not there anymore and then I'll understand why she
was so sure to do what she did as she could bear no more.

I Miss Her

By Lanelle

I miss my Mum so much
It churns me up inside
I wish I could be with her
Where our two worlds
can collide

Just to say Hello again
To tell her that I love her
I want her to come
back home
I hope we can conquer

I know it's gunna happen
It tears me apart each day

And so 20 years later
Every year in May

Mother's Day is low
I feel a little lost
I can't seem to function
Oh what a heavy cost

I miss her, I love her,
and I miss her
No one can replace
A mum that I once had
Is now a vacant space.

Your Stories is online!

Want to share your experience of grief with others? Want to read about other people's grief journey? To learn more about how you can contribute, or to read other people's contributions, go to www.grief.org.au and click on **Your Stories**.

Join with the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement and help transform the lives of grieving people.



The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement relies heavily on donations for the provision of our services. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible and help support a range

of support services including bereavement counselling, support groups, newsletters, events, education and training.

How to make a donation

1. Fill in this donation slip and return to ACGB via post
2. Visit www.grief.org.au and click 'Make a donation'
3. Call us on 1800 642 066

One off donation

Here is my gift of: \$25 \$50 \$100 \$200
 Other \$ _____ min \$2)

My cheque / money order payable to the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement is enclosed or, please debit my:

Mastercard Visa

Signature _____ Expiry ____ / ____

Regular contribution

I will make a regular gift of \$ _____ (min \$10)

I would like to make these payments:

- Every month Every 3 months
 Every 6 months Every 12 months

Contact details*

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Email _____

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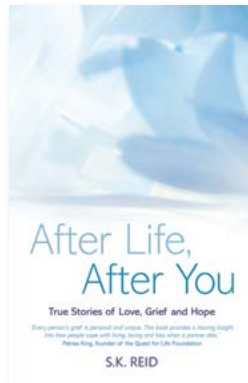
Please send me information about including a gift in my Will to the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

Thank you

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 Mulgrave, Victoria 3170 Email: info@grief.org.au
 ABN: 22 038 903 478 www.grief.org.au

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Featured Resources

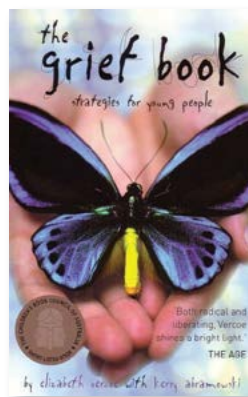


After Life, After You

S.K. Field
 \$22.00

Based around a series of conversations and reflections, this book is the story of three men and seven women who have faced the untimely or unexpected death of their partner. This beautifully written book is an exploration of their love for their partners, the experience of rebuilding their shattered lives, and the process of learning to cope with their grief in order

to develop the capacity to experience joy once again.

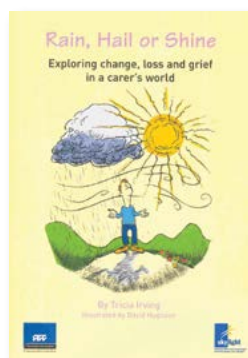


The Grief Book: Strategies for Young People

Elizabeth Vercoe (with Kerry Abramowski)
 \$18.95

Here is a book full of practical ideas to help you or somebody you know move through grief. "A unique and compassionate guide which gives people struggling with grief and loss the tools they need to work through their grief. Above all, [the authors] let

young people know that even in their darkest hours they are not alone." – Dr Michael Carr-Gregg.



Rain, Hail or Shine: Exploring Change, Loss and Grief in a Carer's World

SkyLight NZ
 \$26.95

Aimed specifically at carers, this book talks honestly and openly about the kinds of changes, losses and grief – often unacknowledged – that carers can experience and that can affect their emotions, their physical health,

mental wellbeing and family life. It contains comments from carers who talk about their own grief journeys, and about what has brought them - or is still bringing them - through. A wonderful companion for your journey as a carer that will encourage you to explore your personal experience of loss and grief in your own way, and in your own time.

These books, along with a range of other useful resources, can be purchased from the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement.



Visit www.grief.org.au/resources to download a resource guide/order form, email info@grief.org.au or call 1800 642 066.

CUT ALONG THIS DOTTED LINE





Our Services

The Rosemary Branch

For all enquiries about *The Rosemary Branch*, please contact the Centre on 03 9265 2100 or email newsletters@grief.org.au to subscribe to our mailing list. To download a PDF version of current and past editions, or to receive *The Rosemary Branch* as an e-newsletter go to www.grief.org.au

Bereavement Counselling and Support Service

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB) operates a statewide Specialist Bereavement Counselling and Support Service for Victoria. This program is funded by the Victorian Government Department of Health and has counsellors located across metropolitan Melbourne, in regional areas (Grampians, Gippsland, Hume, Barwon South-West, and Loddon Mallee), and in areas affected by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires. For further information, call 03 9265 2100, or email counselling@grief.org.au

Support Groups

ACGB operates a range of support groups, including groups for adults, children, bereaved partners, death of a parent and many more. For further information call 03 9265 2100, or email support@grief.org.au

Lending Library

The Lending Library is a portable collection of books about grief and loss. The books cover a wide range of topics and cater for all age groups. For more information, please contact the Centre on 03 9265 2100 or email counselling@grief.org.au

Volunteering

Would you like to contribute to the work of the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement as a volunteer? Contact us on 03 9265 2100, or email info@grief.org.au

Ceremony of Remembrance

The Ceremony of Remembrance is held once each year. Information is sent to current and previous clients of the Centre who are on our mailing list prior to the event. For further information call 03 9265 2100, or email counselling@grief.org.au

Better Health Channel



ACGB is a content partner with the Better Health Channel. Better Health Channel provides health and medical information that is quality assured, reliable, up to date, easy to understand, regularly reviewed and locally relevant. For more information, go to www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Healthshare



Healthshare is an Australian national health initiative designed to provide better access to health expertise and improve the quality of health information online. ACGB is a content provider within Healthshare's online bereavement support community. Users can post questions or share experiences with others. ACGB staff regularly answer questions posted by the community. For more information, go to www.healthshare.com.au

We value your feedback

If you have feedback about *The Rosemary Branch*, the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Counselling and Support Service, or any of the services we deliver, we would love to hear from you. Contact us on 03 9265 2100 or email info@grief.org.au



The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

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