



The Sydney
children's
Hospitals Network
care, advocacy, research, education

Bear Cottage Children's Hospice

Grandparent support

When a child dies, grandparents are often deeply affected by both the death of their grandchild and the deep distress of their son or daughter. Many grandparents look after their grandchildren, so their grandchild's death may mean a significant change in their daily life. As a bereaved grandparents, Bear Cottage is here to support you.

A little about grief

No one can anticipate how they will feel or react after the death of a loved one, especially a child. Each person grieves differently no-one can prepare you for how you will feel. You can often feel overwhelmed and experience intense and unfamiliar feelings. It is important to get rest, eat well, and get some exercise, even if you do not feel like it.

Grief is not a mental illness even though you may feel like you are 'going mad'. While very painful, grief is a normal expected process that can include a wide range of reactions and changes in our emotions, behaviours, spirituality and bodies.

Emotional reactions

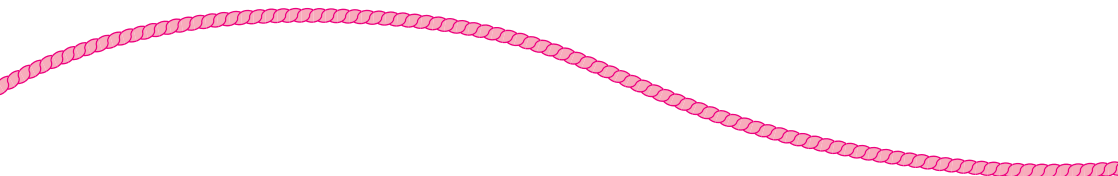
You may:

- Feel unable to feel anything
- Feel very teary or not able to cry at all
- Be irritable, moody or angry
- Feel isolated, lost or very alone
- Be frustrated, feel powerless or experience a sense of hopelessness
- Feel angry about what has happened

Physical reactions

You may:

- Experience heart palpitations, breathing difficulties, dry mouth, over sensitivity to noise, stomach upset, nausea, faintness or dizziness, muscular weakness and aches and pains, tremors in your hands and lips and or extreme fatigue
- Have sleep and appetite changes
- Be easily startled
- Have a heavy feeling in your heart or lump in your throat



Behavioural reactions

You may:

- Not be able to focus or concentrate
- Be forgetful
- Withdraw socially
- Become hyperactive
- Have flashbacks

Spiritual reactions

You may:

- Question or strengthen your faith
- Question your values, priorities and beliefs
- Feel you have lost purpose or meaning in your life

Some things that might help

When you are grieving it is important to look after yourself.

- Get as much rest as possible and try to get into good sleeping patterns
- Gentle exercise helps; try to get into the fresh air and take a short stroll each day
- Slow down and give yourself permission to let go of some of your responsibilities
- Try to eat small nutritious meals, even if you have little appetite
- Accept help from others
- Talk about your grandchild and keep them a part of your family
- Create a memory book or box for all those special belongings or photos you may have
- Keep a journal or a diary
- Treat yourself or do something you may enjoy or that keeps you busy
- Give yourself permission to grieve and be happy sometimes too
- It can help to prepare ahead for some questions people may ask
- Give yourself time to talk about your feelings
- Be gentle on yourself



“People who love each other are always connected by a very special string made of love. Even though you can’t see it with your eyes, you can feel it deep in your heart and know you are always connected to the ones you love.”

The Invisible String, Patrice Karst

“The thing about meeting and talking with other grandparents is that you have someone to talk to who is going through or has gone through what you are and understands your pain and feelings. Talking won’t fix your pain but it helps.”

Bear Cottage Grandparent

When to seek help

There is no right way or time to grieve. Many find additional support and counselling helpful at this time. If you are concerned about yourself or someone you care for, then it’s best to contact a health professional and discuss your concerns.

Bear Cottage bereavement support

Providing bereavement support is an essential part of the Bear Cottage service. Please don’t hesitate to phone us on (02) 9976 8300 or (02) 9976 8336 at any time.

We run a number of camps for the whole family, including Grandparents. These camps offer the chance to take time out, relax and connect with others who are travelling the same path. Over these few days together, lifelong bonds and friendships are built, allowing for opportunities to share tears, laughter, advice and support.

Support and further information

- **Your General Practitioner** / Area Health Service will have bereavement support services available for you. Please call Bear Cottage if you need assistance in arranging this support.
- **Lifeline** provides 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention for anyone experiencing a personal crisis. Phone 13 11 14 or visit lifeline.org.au
- **Griefline** provides dedicated grief helpline service providing counselling and support services free of charge. Phone 1300 845 745 or visit griefline.org.au
- **National Association for Loss and Grief (NALAG)** provides free loss and grief support face-to-face or via phone to those who are grieving phone (02) 6882 9222 or visit nalag.org.au



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