

Recognising and responding to grief

This session explored the nature of grief as a universal human response to loss, how it presents in different ways, and how we can support ourselves and others more effectively. Christopher Hall emphasised that grief is not a disorder, but a natural process reflecting the depth of connection and meaning in our lives .

OVERVIEW

Grief is a response to any significant loss - not only death, but also divorce, job loss, health diagnoses, migration, identity shifts, and other major life transitions. It is multifaceted, deeply personal, and shaped by history, culture, attachment patterns, and available support.

The session highlighted practical, compassionate approaches to coping with grief and supporting others, both personally and in the workplace.

KEY CONCEPTS

Grief is evidence of connection

- Grief reflects what we have valued and loved.
- Loss does not need to involve death to be valid.
- Multiple losses often occur together, compounding the emotional impact.

Grief is multifaceted

- Grief can show up in many domains:
- Emotional (sadness, anger, guilt, relief)
- Cognitive (difficulty concentrating, rumination, 'grief brain')
- Physical (fatigue, sleep disruption, lowered immunity)
- Behavioural (withdrawal, irritability, restlessness)

- Interpersonal and spiritual (questioning meaning, identity shifts)

No two people grieve the same way

Grief is shaped by:

- Personal history and previous losses
- Attachment patterns
- Cultural and community norms
- The nature and circumstances of the loss
- Level of social support

Avoid comparison or expectations about how grief 'should' look.

The dual process of grieving

- Healthy grieving involves natural oscillation between:
- Engaging with the loss (feeling, remembering, processing meaning)
- Restoring daily life (returning to routine, work, and moments of relief)

Stepping away from grief is not avoidance - it is part of adaptive coping.

Time alone does not heal

- Active, engaged coping and supportive relationships influence outcomes more than the mere passage of time.

Speaker: Christopher Hall AM JP MAPS MA
Chief Executive Officer, [Grief Australia](#)



TOP TIPS

Supporting yourself

- **Protect the fundamentals:** Prioritise sleep, nourishment, hydration and gentle movement.
- **Create space for feelings:** Set aside dedicated time to acknowledge emotions rather than suppressing them.
- **Name your emotions:** Labelling feelings can reduce their intensity and improve regulation.
- **Practice self-compassion:** Speak to yourself as you would to a close friend. Avoid self-judgement about the pace or style of your grief.
- **Maintain connection:** Even one trusted relationship can reduce isolation and risk of complicated grief.
- **Use expressive outlets:** Journalling, unsent letters, music, art, ritual or memory projects can support emotional processing.

Supporting others

- **Name the loss directly:** Say the person's name. Acknowledge what has happened. Avoiding the topic increases isolation.
- **Listen more than you speak:** Ask open questions and allow space for genuine responses.
- **Avoid platitudes:** Phrases such as "everything happens for a reason" can shut down connection.
- **Stay consistent over time:** Support after one, three and six months is often more meaningful than intense early attention.
- **Keep inviting:** Continue offering connection without pressure, recognising that withdrawal is common.

In the workplace

For colleagues and managers:

- Acknowledge the loss privately and respectfully.
- Avoid assumptions – ask what support is needed.
- Adjust workload or provide flexibility where possible.
- Check in beyond the initial leave period.
- Refer to professional support when grief becomes overwhelming or prolonged.

LIFESTYLE FACTORS

Grief affects the whole person. Protective lifestyle factors include:

- Regular sleep routines
- Balanced nutrition
- Physical activity
- Time in nature
- Social connection
- Professional support when needed
- Self-care should be flexible and realistic. Lower expectations during periods of acute grief and recognise reduced cognitive and emotional capacity.

THREE KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Grief takes many forms and affects everyone differently.
2. Active coping and compassionate support improve long-term outcomes.
3. Consistent, honest presence makes a meaningful difference.

Grief is not something to 'get over', but something we learn to carry differently over time. With understanding, compassion and practical support, individuals and communities can navigate loss with greater resilience and humanity.

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