

Emotional

- sadness/deep sorrow
- disbelief/numbness
- overwhelmed
- peace/gratitude
- relief/renewal
- irritability/anger/rage
- despair/desperation
- loneliness/longing or pining
- love and great warmth for the person who has died
- guilt
- fear

Spiritual

- questioning the meaning of it all or searching for answers
- feeling pointless and asking questions like 'why bother?'
- feeling spiritually bereft or rejecting long held beliefs or alternatively gaining comfort from religious beliefs
- searching for peace.

Relationships

Grief can often affect the way people relate to friends and family and change how those relationships develop. This might include:

- taking on new social roles
- wanting to withdraw or not wanting to be alone
- concern for other people's reactions to you, and your reactions to them
- understanding that grief is very individual and even a person's gender can influence how they might experience it
- the need to allow space for everyone and a respect for differences.

Tips on helping yourself

Remember that grief is normal and takes time, so be patient with yourself. Crying can often be mistaken for 'not coping' yet it's a healthy way of expressing emotion and can be very healing. It takes courage to grieve, especially in a society that mistakenly values restraint. Here are some tips that may be helpful:

- feel whatever you feel, and be kind to yourself
- get as much rest as you need and try to exercise
- eat nutritious food when you can
- ask for and accept help
- spend time with people who you find helpful
- if you have children, enlist family and friends for help as it may just be too much for you to support grieving children while you too are grieving
- make a memory box, scrapbook or 'things that made us laugh list'
- continue the connection with the person who has died: talk to them, look at the photos, visit the place where they are buried or where their ashes are scattered
- don't feel you must grieve all the time - try some things you enjoy as well, if you feel up to it
- It's okay to smile and feel happy. Your loved one would want that for you and it doesn't mean you're forgetting them.
- get to know your own rhythm for grieving, staying with the sadness and making sense of it, and then retreating from it and distracting yourself
- get friends or family to help when your emotional or physical energy is low
- read books on grief or visit helpful websites.

Acknowledgements: Adapted from 'Common Experiences of Grief' by Clare Holland, Specialist Palliative Care Services, ACT.

We can help
you
understand
your grief

The Leukaemia Foundation provides a range of support and services to people with blood cancer, their families and carers. From emotional support and health and well-being to practical support, transport and accommodation.

Visit leukaemia.org.au or call **1800 620 420** to speak with one of our Blood Cancer Support Coordinators.

**Leukaemia
Foundation**

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Free
support

Leukaemia Foundation

Living well with grief

**Leukaemia
Foundation**

Grief is a natural, powerful and human response to the loss of someone close to us. We all experience grief differently.

Grief support options

We can help you understand your grief, talk through your feelings or identify when an expert may be able to help.

Counselling

Experienced counsellors are available to speak with you over the phone and in some locations face to face counselling is available.

Referrals

Guidance and referrals for you to access other appropriate grief and health services in your local area.

Remembrance events

Each year, *Light the Night*, a national remembrance and celebration event is held at twilight across the country. It's a beautiful evening lantern walk where Australians come together to pay tribute to those facing their own blood cancer journey and remember loved ones lost, creating a glowing sea of support.

Eligibility

These services are available to anyone affected by blood cancer.

Cost

There is no cost for this support.

How to access grief support

Contact us on 1800 620 420, email grief@leukaemia.org.au or visit leukaemia.org.au for more information.

Common experiences with grief

The death of a loved one is one of the most challenging losses we face in life. The feelings created by the loss can be intense, overwhelming and often change dramatically, making the whole process feel chaotic and out of control.

The strength of these feelings usually decreases over time, and you may need some reassurance that you won't always feel this bad. It takes time and support for you to adjust to the new reality, and to start to feel you can recover.

Grief has a purpose

Grief allows us to experience the pain of loss and make the gradual readjustment to life without the person who has died. It's not an illness to be cured or treated but part of the human condition. Grief can be overwhelming, but as you heal the intensity and frequency of these feelings gradually decreases. With time and support, you'll adjust to your new reality and feel you can recover.

Support from those around you

People may be full of well-meaning advice, but often the best support is from someone you trust who will simply listen and not be upset if you fall apart.

Other people will have expectations of your behaviour - this is often more a reflection of their discomfort at your distress. Often people don't know what to say, and for fear of upsetting you, say nothing. Chances are that they are grieving differently to you and are just doing it their way.

What you might be experiencing

While each person's experience of grief is unique, it's normal to experience any of the following, sometimes at the same time:

- unable to stop thoughts running through your mind
- replaying events in your mind wondering if you could have done more and going over 'what ifs'
- thinking nothing makes sense
- confusion, foggy thinking and being unable to concentrate
- worrying you are out of control
- thinking this is never going to end
- concern you won't stop crying, screaming, raging, sobbing
- worrying that others think you should be better by now
- thinking 'I can only manage one day, or one hour, at a time'.

The range of physical, emotional and spiritual changes you could be experiencing are very broad and unique to you. Some of the more common ones include:

Physical

Body distress, ranging from mild symptoms like heartburn and tummy upsets to severe problems like migraines and heart pain (please have your GP check symptoms that are bothering you)

- overwhelming tiredness, exhaustion and fatigue - like 'walking in syrup'
- nausea and no appetite
- wanting to sleep a lot but being unable to sleep
- having a lot of energy and wanting to be very busy
- restlessness and agitation
- changes in sexual feelings