

Grief

Staff Wellbeing Access Program

Grief

COVID-19 is an extraordinary event, that the RACF workforce and health provider workforce have never experienced before. As such, we are being asked to do extraordinary things, over long periods of time and for how long, we do not know. We are a tired workforce who continue to show up for our residents, our colleagues, our families and our RACF community.

As a Residential Aged Care Facility worker, you may have experienced a sense of loss and grief.

“Grief is our response to loss. It is the normal, natural and inevitable response to loss, and it can affect every part of our life, including our thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, feelings, physical health and our relationships with others.” (Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB), 2020)

Through the COVID 19 Pandemic you may have had to face many reasons for experiencing loss and subsequent grief. There may be grief around the loss of:

- how you used to work prior to the COVID 19, such as, how you would drive to work with a coworker,
- the sense of community within your RACF and as a workplace.
- of a loved one or a resident(s)
- of your own health and the subsequent impact on your daily life due to becoming positive to the COVID virus.

Loss has been experienced in many ways and it is normal to grieve a loss. However, the challenge that COVID has created is that sometimes that grief maybe experienced alone, for a long time and in isolation. When a person or loved one has died, the people who cared for this person are faced with the challenges or normal customary funeral arrangements and difficulties in celebrating that person’s life with others.

COVID has impacted on all aspects of our life, from birth, life itself and death. Along this path it is normal experience feelings of loss.

Despite all that you may be experiencing on a personal level, it is the knowledge that you are still providing care as part of the valuable RACF Workforce. Still working hard as part of a team to keep the COVID at bay and reducing its impact on your residents and greater community. You are also working hard to support residents, your coworkers and the RACF community in their loss and grief. This may have an impact that compounds your own feelings of loss and grief.

Some people may also feel they are unable to openly acknowledge their grief when there are so many others grieving around you. You may be grieving in isolation. ACGB have identified this as “Disenfranchised grief” as you may feel you are unable to share your loss and grief.

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Common effects of loss and grief:

- Difficulty in getting to sleep, or regular waking through the night and intrusive thoughts.
- Feelings of sadness, shock, denial, numbness, a sense of unreality, anger, guilt, blame, relief
- Grief is exhausting and may weaken the immune system making you prone to illness.
- People might feel or act differently to usual. They might have difficulty concentrating, withdraw and not enjoy their usual activities.
- Some people may experience dreams about their loved one, feeling their presence or hearing their voice. People who are grieving often search for meaning and examine their spiritual beliefs.
- Some may increase their intake of alcohol to help them cope.
- You find that you are unable to attend to your normal routine as your grief has become the dominant emotion in your day-to-day life

How do I cope with my grief?

Healing happens over time. You may always carry some sadness and miss a person once they are gone, but the painful, intense feelings should gradually subside, and we learn to live around our grief.

Allow yourself to grieve: It is natural to cry. Many people find crying a relief. Exploring and expressing emotions can be a part of the healing process. Listening to music or writing can help. Time spent alone can allow you to connect with your emotions.

Live one day at a time: Set a regular daily routine and do something special for yourself every day. Try to go for a walk, eat healthily, meditate, and relax. It's a good idea to avoid making any major decisions for a year after the death of someone you love.

Seek Help: Talking to your doctor, see a counsellor or connect with a relative or friend you trust can be a big help.

Stay Connected: It's also important to spend time with supportive people. Accept offers of help, talk about your loved one, or simply spend time with others.

Create positive memories: Honour the life of the person who has died. Collect photos or keepsakes, write a journal, write a letter to the person who died, or share stories and rituals with others. These can help create meaning after loss.

Look after your health: Get some regular exercise, eat healthy food, and make sure you have enough sleep. Avoid recreational drugs and keep alcohol use to a sensible level.

Anniversaries: Birthdays, anniversaries or holidays can trigger intense feelings of grief. It may help to mark these occasions with a simple ceremony like lighting a candle, playing music, planting a tree, or gathering with family.

Maintain check-ins with your manager: or reach out to a person in the RACF who can support you in your workplace.

Where to get help:

- Access your Employee Assistance Program: speak to HR or look at your Organisation's employee website or noticeboard.
- Contact HeadtoHealth on 1800 595 212 or <https://headtohealthvic.org.au/>
- Visit your G.P. who can link you with a counsellor

Website links & resources:

1. Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement: <https://www.grief.org.au/>
2. Beyondblue: <https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/>
3. Smiling Mind: <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/thrive-inside>
4. Download the MyGriefApp on your smart phone.

Tips for self-love

- Healthy eating
- Minimise alcohol
- Create a regular sleep routine
- Increase exercise or walking
- Reach out to those important to you
- Take time to breathe.
- Learn mindfulness.