

# Loss & GRIEF



**Loss & Grief**

for Junior / Middle / Senior Secondary  
Health / Personal Development

*mind*  
matters  
2005

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*Games collection*

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*Friendship and belonging*

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##### ***Enhancing Resilience 2: Stress and Coping***

*Introduction*

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*Coping*

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*Stressbusters*

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##### ***A Whole School Approach to Dealing with Bullying and Harassment***

*Facing facts – an approach to dealing with bullying through the Health class*

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*Giving voice – an approach to dealing with bullying through the English class*

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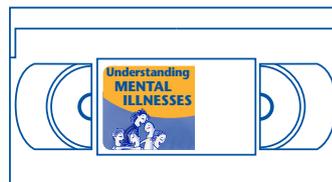
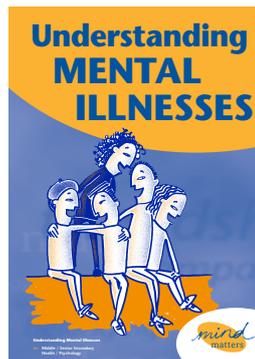
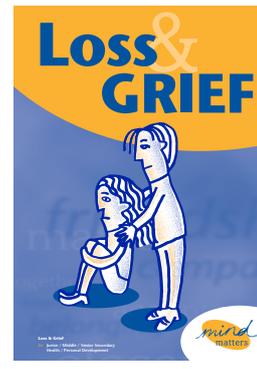
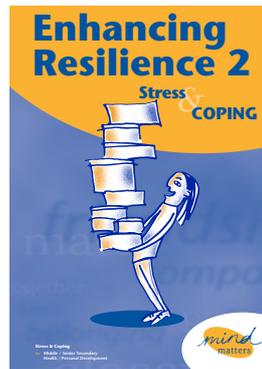
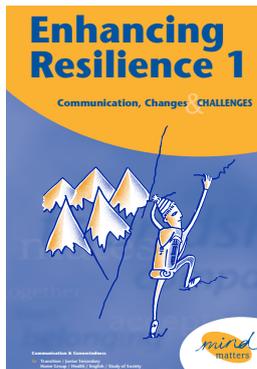
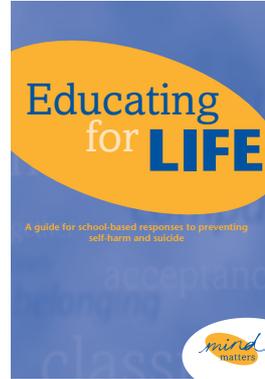
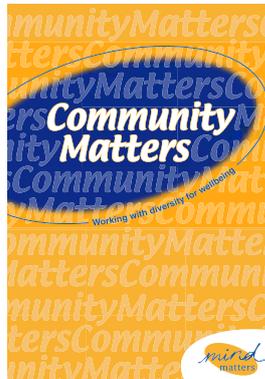
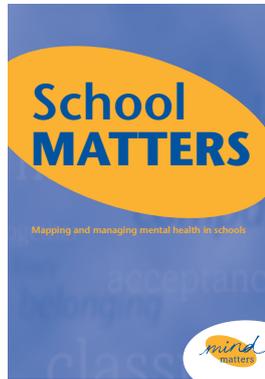
Author: Dr Louise Rowling

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### **Community Matters**

Use this booklet in conjunction with *CommunityMatters*, which further explores some of the cultural and social contexts of loss and grief.

# The MindMatters materials



*This booklet is part of MindMatters: a mental health promotion resource for secondary schools. It is best used as part of a comprehensive whole school approach to the promotion of mental health as outlined in the SchoolMatters booklet.*

## MindMatters resources

### **SchoolMatters: Mapping and Managing Mental Health in Schools**

This overarching document provides schools with a framework and planning tools to assist them with possible structures, strategies, partnerships and curriculum programs to promote and protect the mental health of all members of the school community.

### **CommunityMatters: Working with Diversity for Wellbeing**

This booklet explores community, culture and identity and suggests strategies for managing the wellbeing needs of diverse groups of students, particularly those who feel marginalised for social reasons, within the contexts of school and broader communities.

### **Educating for Life: A Guide for School-Based Responses to Preventing Self-Harm and Suicide**

This guide outlines the policies, processes and practices that contribute to a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention.

### **Enhancing Resilience 1: Communication, Changes and Challenges**

The curriculum units are designed to enhance resilience via the promotion of communication, participation, positive self-regard, teamwork and a sense of belonging and connectedness to school. They are particularly useful for use with new groups.

#### *Creating connections*

Activities for the Home Group, Personal Development, Pastoral Care or core curriculum teacher, focussing on issues of communication, codes of behaviour and team work.

#### *Games collection*

A collection of interactive games designed to promote communication, cooperation and teambuilding. Suitable for use within each of the key learning areas.

#### *Friendship and belonging*

Activities for the English class exploring the challenge of making and maintaining friendships.

#### *People, identity and culture*

Activities for the Study of Society class exploring personal and social identity, and addressing issues of belonging and culture.

### **Enhancing Resilience 2: Stress and Coping**

This booklet guides schools in their focus on enhancing the resilience and connectedness of their students. It is targeted at middle to senior secondary students and deals with the importance

of providing ongoing opportunities for participation and communication, creating a positive school culture, friendly relationships, and a valuing of school and community. Two booklets, designed for use in Health, Pastoral Care or Religious Education, address issues of coping with stress and challenge, help-seeking, peer support, stress-management, and goal setting.

#### *Coping*

Activities for Health or Pastoral Care in which students identify some of the stresses and challenges young people have to deal with, and explore the range of emotions commonly associated with feelings of stress. They examine a range of coping strategies and consider ways of dealing with a range of challenging circumstances.

#### *Stressbusters*

Activities for Health or Pastoral Care in which students explore the role and effect of supportive groups, the role of trust and courage in help-seeking behaviour, and explore conflict resolution and stress-management techniques.

### **A Whole School Approach to Dealing with Bullying and Harassment**

This booklet guides schools in their attempts to take a whole school approach to dealing with bullying and harassment. A comprehensive check list to guide policy and practice is included. Three curriculum units, targeted at junior secondary school students, are provided for use in the Health, English and Drama class. The Health unit is also suitable for

Personal Development and Pastoral Care classes. It is anticipated that schools would choose one of the units for use with a particular class.

#### *Facing facts: a whole school approach to dealing with bullying and harassment for use in the Health class*

Students define and give examples of different types of bullying and harassment, and consider the effects of bullying on victims, perpetrators and onlookers. They identify common barriers to seeking help or taking protective action. They are equipped to research bullying in their own school and use interactive exercises to develop help-seeking and assertiveness.

#### *Giving voice: a whole school approach to dealing with bullying and harassment for use in the English class*

Students explore the language of bullying, and look at forms of bullying perpetuated at different levels of society. They use group work and participatory exercises to read, write and discuss poetry, stories and newspaper items, exploring the effects of bullying and possibilities for protective action.

#### *Defining moments: a whole school approach to dealing with bullying and harassment for use in the Drama class*

Students explore the body language of status and power, identify and enact common human responses to messages of welcome or rejection. They also use a range of dramatic devices to depict and examine the stories and experiences of oppression, and prepare a performance piece around the theme of bullying.

## **Understanding Mental Illnesses**

This document provides an overview of the issues a school may face in relation to mental illness among students, staff and families. It includes a curriculum unit, aimed at middle to senior secondary students, that intends to increase students' understanding of mental illness, reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems, and increase help-seeking behaviour. A video accompanies this curriculum unit, and this is also relevant for considering mental illness and stigma with any school audience.

## **Loss and Grief**

Issues of loss and grief have been linked to depression, and traditionally such issues have been under-explored in schools. This document provides an overview of school practices relevant to dealing with death and loss within the school, including a sequence of lessons for junior, middle and senior secondary school students.

## **MindMatters Website:**

**[www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters)**

The website contains background information, a diary of events, case studies, a chat line, an annotated bibliography, PDF copies of all the booklets, links to other sites, state-by-state information on professional development programs, curriculum ideas referenced to curriculum frameworks and stories of how schools are implementing *MindMatters*.

*MindMatters is available from:*

**Curriculum Corporation  
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**Fax 03 9639 1616**

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*Or download from the MindMatters website:*

**<http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters>**

# How to use this booklet

It is intended that the classroom program will be taught as part of a comprehensive whole school approach to mental health promotion as outlined in the *SchoolMatters* and *Educating for Life* booklets. As part of a whole school approach, professional development and collegial support should be available to the classroom teacher.

It is recommended that teachers use, or encompass, the whole unit of work to

enhance student awareness, knowledge and skills. Using one or two sessions from the start of each unit is likely to raise awareness, but allow insufficient time for skill-development. Teachers should read the introductory section of the booklet that outlines some of the key concepts and research relevant to the issues covered in the classroom program.

## KEY

### SESSION

A session includes a series of activities that may extend over a number of lessons. Time taken to complete any activity can vary greatly from class to class. Teachers may wish to modify activities to suit the needs of their class.

### INTENTION

The intention identifies the knowledge and skills to work towards in the session.

### RESOURCES

A list of the resources required for the session.

### HOW TO

In the 'How to' section, a step by step approach is used to model how the session might be run.

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Sample questions are provided as a guide to class discussion.

### TEACHER TIPS

Assistance and advice is provided for the teacher in the form of teacher tips in boxes in the left column.

### TEACHER TALK

This text provides information to be provided to the class or background information for the teacher.

### Classroom resources:

-  activity sheets are provided as masters
-  information sheets are provided as masters
-  overhead transparency masters

# Rationale

## A whole school approach to dealing with loss and grief

In recent years there has been a great deal of interest in the ways young people cope with the circumstances they confront in their lives. Schools are very much aware that just as physical illness can affect a student's performance or capacity to concentrate and engage in study, so too can a challenging personal or family situation, relationship problem or mental health problem.

Schools committed to the welfare and learning of their students are addressing the questions:

- How can we provide a safe and supportive environment in which all students can maximise their learning?
- How can we remain accessible and responsive to their needs?
- How can we assist our students to develop their ability to cope with challenge and stress?
- How can we identify and support those students in particular need of assistance or support?
- How can we support students who are dealing with experiences of trauma or dislocation?

The *Loss and Grief* unit of *MindMatters* models some of the processes schools can use to support students in developing their ability to cope with change and challenge, an aspect of resilience.

A whole school approach to enhancing resilience entails:

- a shift from a focus on 'fixing' individuals to that of creating healthy systems
- a shift from problems-based needs assessment to a belief in human potential for development, learning and wellbeing
- an acknowledgment that the 'health of the helper' is critical.\*

The conceptual model underpinning *MindMatters* is that of the Health Promoting Schools. This model entails a focus on the interconnecting domains of curriculum, school ethos and partnership (see diagram on page 21). Often when using schools as a setting for health promotion or intervention, only the domain of curriculum is targeted, forgetting the impact of school ethos and environment, and the power and potential support to be generated through partnerships with parents, community and service providers.

### The Health Promoting Schools framework



\* Benard (1997), 'A Framework for Practice: Tapping Innate Resilience', in *Resiliency in Action*

Taking a whole school approach to loss and grief acknowledges those students with particular needs and seeks to provide for them. In addition, it seeks to promote and provide a safe and supportive environment and an ethos conducive to mental health and learning. The World Health Organisation model of a comprehensive school mental health program is a useful guide in considering the place of school-based efforts.

for the school in providing a supportive environment.

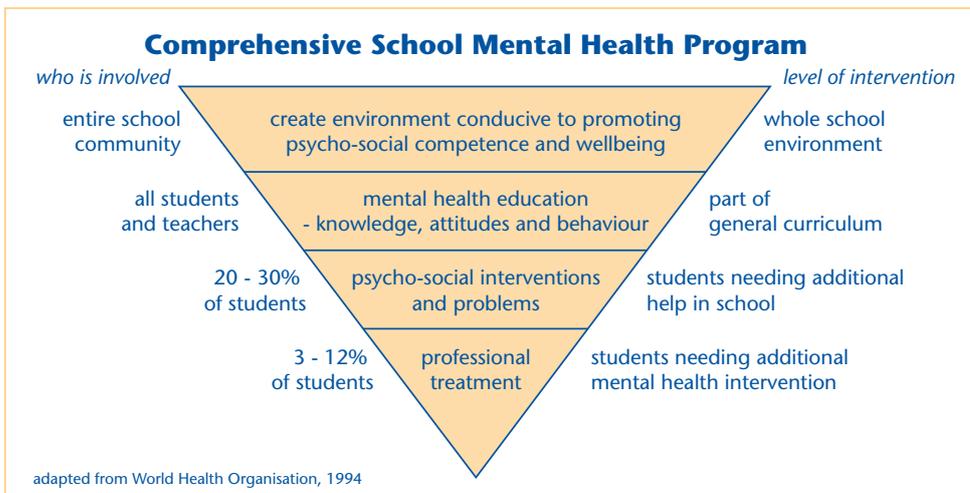
Developmental changes at the time of adolescence means that peers and adults other than parents have a role to play in helping young people understand and cope with loss experiences. Loss experiences are interpreted through social interaction. Young people look to peers and teachers in their schools to help:

- define the reality of their loss
- express feelings associated with it
- provide support and access to information
- integrate the experience into their lives.

The school is a social institution for young people and a workplace for staff, all of whom

spend many hours there. It can provide an environment (in terms of policies, programs and practices) that is supportive, as well as access to individuals who can provide help through formal and informal mechanisms.

The family is the primary source of support for young people. In considering loss and grief as an issue for schools, the role of parents is not supplanted but alternatives are provided. Teachers will not be telling students what to feel, just that it is natural to feel loss and grief. Schools are providing young people with an opportunity for some mastery over these life events through vicarious experiences from hearing others' stories. Hearing factual information about normal grief reactions helps to 'normalise' students' experiences. This is critical at a time in



## Understanding loss and grief

Research indicates that a major factor to influence the outcome of grieving for young people is the support they receive from adults and peers. Additionally, loss experiences have the capacity to affect teachers' workplace performance. This can be particularly problematic when the loss is a 'professional loss', directly related to the work environment, such as the death of a student, colleague or a major accident or public crisis involving school personnel or property. Current approaches to grief often focus on helping individuals to cope. What is needed is a whole school approach that accepts loss and grief as normal life experience, and identifies a role

their lives when they are highly conscious about being and feeling different.

Teachers see that teaching about loss and grief, and supporting grieving young people is part of their role as a teacher. It is relating to students so that they feel confident in the learning situation, a necessity for them to achieve their educational goals.

Developing a whole school approach to loss and grief can serve to intervene, to manage critical incidents and to support grieving, young people. It can also act in a preventative way, by information exchange, by positive attitude formation for seeking and receiving help, and by supporting others. Acknowledging the impact of loss on school community members indicates the school's aim to provide a safe, caring, and supportive environment.

### **Grief and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities**

The grief of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia has some significant differences to other groups: most notably, multiple traumas and continuing grief related to dispossession from land; removal of children from families; and loss of community and cultural heritage. Current trauma experienced in families includes incarceration of family members and frequent deaths including suicides, particularly of young men. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have structures for supporting grieving members: including Elders; consultative councils; and long established practices of care and support which may vary with

location and language groups.

Consequently, this resource, which is not based specifically on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, may not be appropriate for young people from these communities. It is essential to liaise with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members before making the decision to teach these lessons.

## **Using the Health Promoting Schools framework**

The existence and implementation of a critical incident management plan (see *SchoolMatters* and *Educating for Life*) represents the caring ethos of the school and demonstrates a commitment to the wellbeing of school community members, should a traumatic incident occur (see diagram on page 21).

There will also be other school policies that relate to the provision of support for grieving adolescents. Student welfare, pastoral care, involvement of the school with outside agencies, information management, privacy and confidentiality, and assessment policy are good examples. Schools may wish to acknowledge the potential impact of grief on school performance and allow for special arrangements.

### **School partnerships**

Well developed partnerships with outside agencies provide the school with ready access to personnel for referral of 'at risk' students or staff traumatised by violence or other critical incidents. These relationships also provide resources that

can assist in educating families, who can then be more supportive and understanding of the experience of their grieving children and siblings.

Partnerships with religious and cultural leaders bring the opportunity for the school to work with the community in support of families. Grieving young people can be supported in small groups with trained facilitators (see Resource list page 71).

## School practices

Schools need to develop practices for the provision of support and pastoral care for students experiencing loss, family separation, dislocation, or bereavement. In addition, schools should develop or review practices for information exchange about the private lives of students and their families, utilising different levels of detail depending on the role of the staff member (see also *SchoolMatters*).

Critical incident management plans recommend professional counselling. A typical reaction from staff (particularly executive staff) is to say that they don't need debriefing. While it may never be compulsory, all should be encouraged to attend, even if attendance is to act as a role-model and to demonstrate support for the practice, thereby acknowledging people's different reactions and coping styles.

Where suicide occurs, loss and grief issues for staff and students can be particularly difficult, and imitation suicide and suicide attempts can occur. The *Educating for Life: a guide for school-based responses to preventing self-harm and suicide* included in *MindMatters*, provides guidance for schools in dealing with these issues. This resource also covers the

issues of discussing suicide in class and the links between suicide prevention and a whole school approach to mental health. In particular, the *Educating for Life* resource suggests that due to the suggestibility factors in relation to suicide, teachers are advised not to undertake specific suicide awareness units. It is best to refer to suicide within the context of a broader curriculum of problem-solving and emotional wellbeing, for example, in the context of discussing coping or help-seeking, dealing with grief or teaching about mental illness. Teachers need to be aware that vulnerable students can become distressed during discussions of these issues. In the context of an ongoing health or personal development class teachers need to:

- promote help-seeking behaviour
- explain that suicide attempts are usually associated with depression and that depression is treatable
- use only those examples that do not portray suicide as romantic, heroic or tragic
- avoid being dismissive of, or trivialising the painful realities of people's lives.

## Curriculum materials

The *Loss and Grief* curriculum provided in *MindMatters* aims to present age appropriate information to students. It provides them with the opportunity to:

- understand the reality of death and its relationship to life
- understand that there are significant adults in their lives who are able to answer their questions about death and divorce and support them in coping with grief

- identify when they need help and be aware of the type of help and support available, and how to access it, also exploring the barriers to accessing help
- develop the skills to be a supportive friend and to identify the limits of their responsibility for others.

There are four key messages that students can learn:

- people react differently to loss experiences
- there are strategies which help people cope with their own and /or a friend's loss experiences
- everybody needs to be able to identify sources of help
- people from different cultural /ethnic /religious backgrounds may cope with loss in different ways.

## National curriculum framework

The sessions contained in this section are at levels 5 and 6 of the National Statements in Health.

### Junior Secondary

Level 5 Health  
Human Relations

A student:

*5.13 Demonstrates processes for managing changes in relationships.*

### Middle to Senior Secondary

Level 6 Health  
Human Relations

Analyse how different contexts and situations influence personal values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.



Links with curriculum frameworks are made on a state-by-state basis on the website.

## Teacher professional development

Loss and grief can be a sensitive issue for both staff and students. Professional development is essential. Teachers working in the area should have:

- well developed communication skills
- an awareness of grief and bereavement patterns
- identified their own feelings about loss experiences
- knowledge of the content and process of grief education
- accepted loss and grief as part of life.

Teaching about loss and grief requires 'readiness to teach' both emotionally and content-wise. A factual, direct approach, designed not to frighten, needs to be adopted. To ensure a balanced approach in deciding on content, teaching and learning strategies, pursuing particular issues and choosing resource material, you may need to ask yourself: have I achieved a balance between focusing on the facts of grief experiences and the emotional responses of the students?

In teaching loss and grief you are developing the following competencies relating to students' learning:

- knowledge about loss and grief
- skills to use the information to help themselves

- knowledge and skills to seek help and recognise when support would be beneficial
- how to use the information to understand and support others
- how the knowledge and skills will assist students to be supportive school community members.

The extent to which students acquire the competencies is related as much to their ability to acquire the skills as it is related to the ability and sensitivity of the teacher. Teaching about loss and grief requires the teacher to be able to sensitively switch with ease, from hearing one student's story about a loss experience to giving next week's assignment to the whole class. Varying roles may need to be played at different times in a lesson:

- teacher (ending a lesson by summarising discussion)
- sympathetic listener (encouraging students to listen to their peer as they share their story)
- personal adviser to students who would benefit from referral.

In creating a trusting environment, students may benefit from sharing with a buddy and then in a foursome. This is less threatening than whole class disclosure. Whole class discussion may be useful as a result of a shared experience, for example, an incident involving the school community or after watching a video.

## Personal disclosure

Teacher's personal disclosure about loss experiences may be less problematic with reference to grief than other sensitive issues such as sexuality. Research has identified that students see this disclosure as the teacher 'being human'. It does not lessen their respect for the teacher, and the students believe that these teachers are more likely to understand them as individuals.

Teachers themselves feel that this involvement of 'the personal' is their professional responsibility in teaching in this area, and is based on sound educational principles. Their day-to-day work involves finding ways to help students understand academic topics. In teaching about loss and grief, teachers are teaching about life, so naturally their own life experiences make this learning concrete.

Students do look to their teachers as role-models of how adults react and behave, for example, being open and honest and having positive attitudes (such as it is alright to cry and talk about feelings). Teachers need to be careful not to suggest their behaviour is the only way to act, but use their experiences as springboards for the students' discussions. The possibility of personal disclosure by teacher or students means that class rules need to be established about sharing details of this information with others.

Trust and respect are important elements in these teaching /learning interactions:

- for the teacher in trusting the student's handling of personal information
- for the student in respecting the teacher's right to privacy (see *SchoolMatters*).

In a classroom you may need to be alert to students with special needs, such as:

- those with an illness that could cause their death, for example, cystic fibrosis, asthma, cancer
- those who have experienced significant life changes or trauma that could have resulted in vulnerable emotional states
- those who have a greater chance of experiencing a major loss in the near future, for example, a student who has a parent or sibling with a terminal illness
- those from particular cultural ethnic and religious backgrounds
- those with an existing mental health problem or suicide ideation (see *Educating for Life*).

## **Guidelines for responding to students' questions**

Students are often curious about a teacher's personal beliefs about issues, or request detailed information that could appear to some to be quite macabre. It is important that a teacher has thought about and prepared a response to these questions.

### **Questions frequently asked**

- Are you afraid of death?
- Is it better to die at home or in a hospital?
- Do you believe in euthanasia?
- Why do people die?
- When you die do you want to be cremated, embalmed and buried, or just buried?
- Can you be frozen till a cure is found for your disease?

In deciding how to respond you should consider the following options.

### **Answer honestly**

This establishes your willingness to share personal viewpoints. Modelling honesty removes the 'silence factor' around the topic, but also alerts students to your possible bias.

### **Refuse to answer**

You may have agreed as a class that no one will be required to disclose personal information (you are included in this agreement). You may refuse to answer if:

- an honest response would weaken your credibility and present you as an inappropriate model
- your response may conflict with school community values.

### **Equivocate / deflecting responses**

- Is it important for you to know?
- Would it make a difference to you what way I answered?
- How do you think your parents would respond to that question?
- Tell a story that relates to a friend (a friend of mine believes that...).

Each of these options raises certain issues depending on:

- the setting
- the class
- your school community
- the context of the question
- who is asking the question
- why the question is being asked.

In deciding how to respond, the following issues should be kept in mind:

- **Ensure educational value**

What are the motives behind your response, for example, to be seen as friendly or to meet some of your own needs about grief? The main question to ask yourself is: will my response further the outcomes for teaching about loss and grief?

- **Be comfortable**

While teaching about sensitive issues such as grief can be more difficult than other topics, as you learn, read and teach about grief, any discomfort you may feel will lessen. Your discomfort can be conveyed by avoiding particular topics students may be interested in; changing the line of discussion when emotive issues are aired; and your body language.

- **Be above board**

Act upon principles you have established in your mind from discussions with colleagues, and your preparation to teach in this area. A straightforward refusal to answer may be an appropriate response.

## **How do students respond to lessons about loss and grief?**

Students may need guidance as to appropriate behaviour, both as a 'sharing student' and a 'listening student'. Much of the learning that will come from these experiential lessons takes place in the times when the students talk and share; when they listen and hear others' thoughts and experiences; and when they reflect on how the learning can be applied to their own experiences of loss and grief. (It is important to provide students with the opportunity for

personal reflection. These reflections may be shared with others or kept as private thoughts recorded in a journal.)

Prompts for personal reflection include:

- How did that feel?
- What I have learned is...
- How does what I have heard apply to my experiences?

Some students engage in discussions readily, sharing stories of great impact in their lives. Others are very quiet and seemingly uninvolved, but they are often thinking deeply about what they hear. Being quiet does not necessarily mean being uninvolved.

In confronting loss experiences, students' security can be threatened. It is essential that an emotionally safe environment is created for teaching and learning about loss and grief. Students' privacy should be respected, with class rules established regarding the choice of nondisclosure of information.

Students report that they are ambivalent about lessons on loss and grief, 'not liking them, but feeling it is necessary to talk' about these experiences. Research indicates that many students use written forms of self-expression about grief (such as poetry, diaries, stories and songs). Females are more likely than males to use these methods, and song writing is most frequently used to express positive emotions. There is a need, therefore, to use a variety of methods in teaching about loss and grief. Creative teaching maximises student involvement.

## Resurgence of feelings phenomenon

School personnel need to be aware how the impact of past loss experiences, particularly those connected with their professional lives, can be triggered by teaching about loss and grief, and by supporting grieving students. Teachers have been recognised as 'disenfranchised grievers'. Disenfranchised grief is what people experience when they incur a loss that is not, or cannot be, openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported. Disenfranchised grief of teachers may be created by personal-professional duality:

- teachers' need to be 'human'
- teachers' professional beliefs
- duty of care for young people.

There are three triggers for disenfranchised grief:

- the relationship with the person is not recognised
- the loss is not recognised
- society does not give the person that role.

For school personnel, the phenomena occurs because teaching is a profession based on human interactions where emotional connections are made. There exists the belief among teachers that you have to hide your emotions to manage students or a class. Yet if something traumatic occurs, it may involve intense emotional responses from students.

Being affected by grief may influence teachers' views of themselves as competent professionals. Teachers may believe that they have to set an example of 'coping' by controlling situations and their emotions, for example, by not expressing or acknowledging their grief.

The implications for school communities are:

- the need to provide a supportive structure in the workplace
- that appropriate debriefing is offered to staff
- acknowledging that the death of a student could be a teacher's most feared loss ('it could be my child').

Thoughts and feelings from previous losses can be triggered by current loss experiences and discussions about loss. Sometimes people are conscious of this connection, but at other times it can be at a subconscious level, particularly if the loss was traumatic or at an earlier developmental age. The classroom teacher may be alerted to these instances by what appears to be an 'overreaction' to an event or discussion. For example, an adolescent's first broken love affair could trigger fears of abandonment, which was previously experienced when this person's parents separated years before. Teachers will need to follow up on these reactions, either seeking information from other staff or talking with the student or the caregivers. Any of these may be followed up by a referral to the school counsellor / psychologist.

## How to respond to an upset child

It is possible that students may get upset during a lesson about grief. Setting up a procedure to manage such an occurrence needs to be done before lessons are taught. The class should be informed at the beginning of the lesson:

'If anyone feels upset or sad about the things we discuss and does not want to stay in the classroom, you may go to [name a safe place that has already been arranged]'. Follow-up with the student after the lesson.

# Signs of grieving in students

(adapted from: Stevenson, RG & Stevenson EP [eds] *Teaching Students about Death*)

## Feelings

- having bouts of depression and sadness
- feeling different
- being unable to respond to praise or reward
- showing lack of enjoyment from pleasurable activities
- feeling bad about oneself
- feeling guilty
- feeling pessimistic about life and sorry for oneself
- being easily tearful or crying spontaneously
- showing significant changes in facial expression and eye contact
- showing a loss of enthusiasm and excitement
- displaying irritability and excessive anger and violation of the rights of others
- being atypically confrontational; opposing authority figures
- displaying accident proneness or forgetfulness

## Thoughts

- unfocussed, repetitive thoughts, preoccupation, or day dreaming
- loss of ability to concentrate or think clearly
- difficulty making decisions
- preoccupation with death or loss or being alone

## Behaviours

- showing significant changes in personal appearance (including dress and grooming)
- being less talkative or uneasy and restless
- showing significant changes in normal behaviours (changes in personal norms, alcohol use, stealing, promiscuity, illegal behaviour)
- experiencing a change in eating habits
- marked change in school performance
- poor grades despite trying hard
- experiencing a change in sleeping patterns
- experiencing changes in bodily functions, for example, headaches
- showing changes in habits and interests
- having low energy or lethargy
- regressing to immature behaviours
- displaying clinging behaviours
- showing social withdrawal or avoidance

## **Long-term impact of loss on an adolescent's behaviour at school**

- Apathy and withdrawal from many aspects of school and personal life.
- Behaving badly to get punished and assuage feelings of guilt and anger.
- Imitating the behaviour of a 'lost' person to keep that person 'present'.
- Changing values because the 'quality' of life may seem more important than the 'quantity'; or feeling so low that nothing is so important to worry about.
- Being (or acting) humorous in a way that may appear tasteless or inappropriate, or joking about losses and fears; laughter can release tension, restore control or hide fears.
- The emotional energy that grieving absorbs may not leave the resources required for school work; even time spent on schoolwork may not be as productive, leaving students feeling more guilt and confusion, particularly if the grief is delayed.

## **Gender differences in adolescent loss reactions and coping styles**

### **Loss reactions**

#### *Masculine grievers:*

- experience psychosomatic symptoms greater than feminine grievers, in the case of parental death
- experience an increase in conflict with teachers and superiors
- experience irritability, work inhibition, and sleep disturbances
- experience preoccupation.

#### *Feminine grievers:*

- experience an increase in conflict within close relationships
- experience lower self-esteem
- experience body image distortion, loss of appetite, and weight loss
- experience moodiness
- feel 'caught' between parents in the case of divorce
- report greater intensity in their reactions such as depression, anxiety, intrusive images, and recurrent thoughts
- experience more sadness
- lack initiative
- experience concentration difficulties
- may experience a prolonged expression of grief.

### **Coping styles**

#### *Masculine grievers:*

- partake in risk-taking behaviour
- partake in more substance abuse
- experience avoidance (negative) / introspective reflection (positive)
- don't talk because they are often unsuccessful in intimate communications
- repress the event
- live up to social norms for what is expected male behaviour
- use self-reliance.

#### *Feminine grievers:*

- talk more, particularly with friends
- identify their friends as being useful in coping
- prefer to be around others
- are more likely to report being depressed.

## When to refer

If a student appears to be affected by their grief for an unduly long time (over a year for instance) with little sign of improvement, it is appropriate to refer the student to the counsellor. In some people unresolved grief can lead to depression.

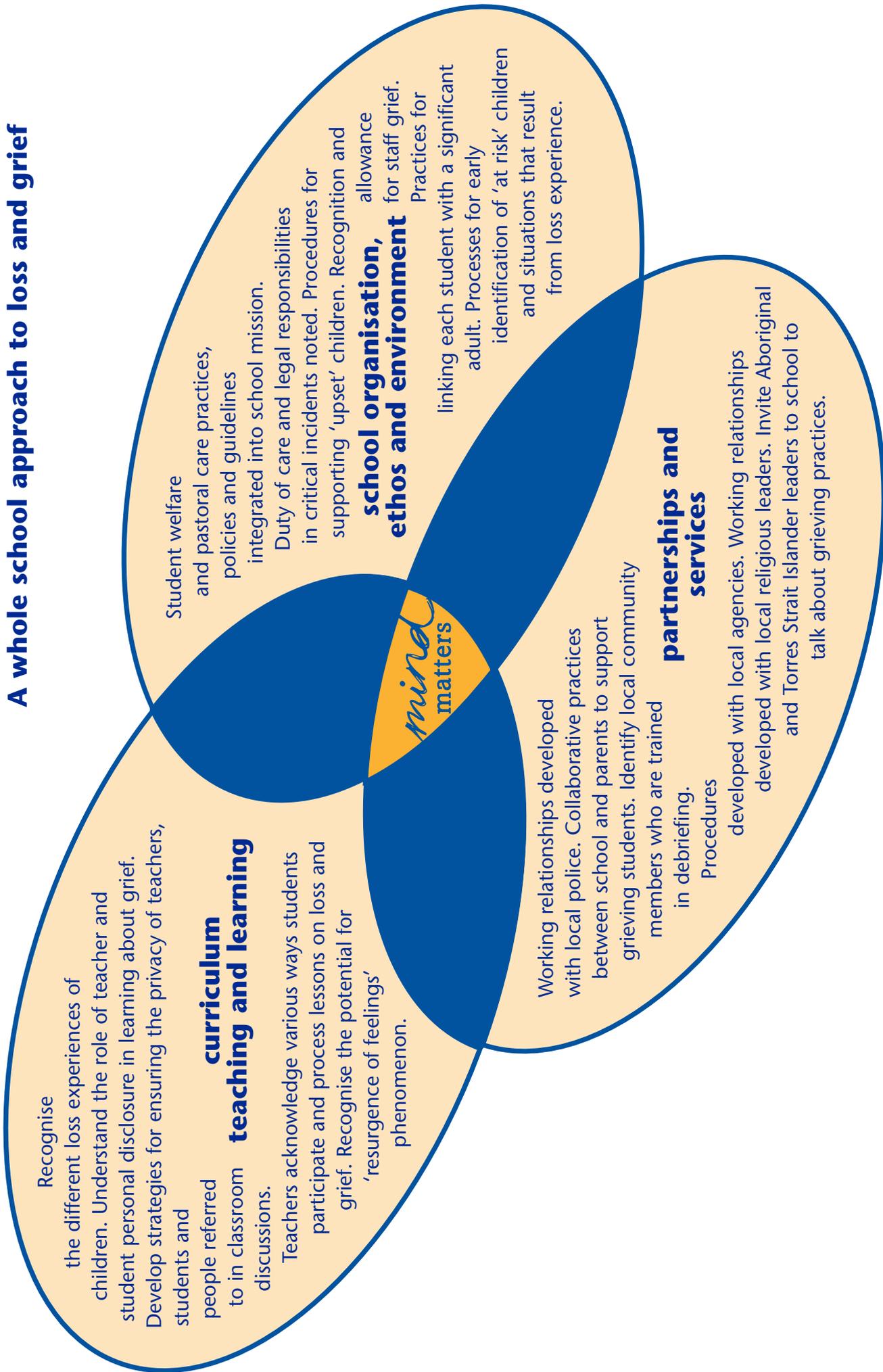
# Check list of strategies for dealing with loss and grief

## Have you:

- Studied the ellipses that exemplify a whole school approach to loss and grief (see page 21)?
- Discussed with the school community the particular sensitivities in your community such as religious or cultural practices?
- Read the teacher background information?
- Experienced some professional development on loss and grief, for example, whole school session; read the professional development material in this resource; attended other training?
- Read all the lessons you will teach, and viewed any audio-visual material?
- Taught preparatory lessons on mental health such as the *Resilience* units?
- Discussed with other staff a set of principles to guide teaching about:
  - privacy and confidentiality
  - strategies for support of students
  - strategies for staff teaching in the area to 'debrief'
- how to respond to an upset child, yet continue with a lesson?
- Allowed enough time to cover all the core material?
- Identified any students at risk in your class?
- Notified the school counsellor / chaplain / pastoral care coordinator that you will be teaching this topic, and invited them to join you for all or part of the lessons?
- Informed the class that next week's topic will be about loss and grief?
- Investigated establishing a student support program?
- Established the school's policy of discussing suicide if a student raises it? (see *Educating for Life*)
- Identified any students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent and, if appropriate, made contact with parents, carers or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives?



# A whole school approach to loss and grief



# Understanding

life changes result in loss and grief

At different times during these lessons you may need to remind the class about privacy or offer to follow up with a student you may think requires special help (make this offer on a one-to-one basis, not in front of the class).

## Beginning and ending on a positive note

See warm-up games from *Defining moments* or *Enhancing Resilience 1* to start and finish the units on a positive note.

## Community Matters

Chapter 3 ('Diversity and wellbeing') explores loss and grief issues in a cultural and social context.

## JUNIOR SECONDARY

### Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- understand how life changes involve losses
- recognise negative reactions as grief reactions.

### Resources

- Blackboard /whiteboard
- Paper /workbooks for drawing
- *Extension: Learning to grieve* lesson 26 (see Resource list)
- Video 'Bolt from the Blue' (see Resource list)
- Introductory teacher professional development material

### How to

#### ACTIVITY 1: Change

1. Draw four columns on the board and ask the class to copy them into their workbooks. Write the following:

CHANGES IN SCHOOL LIFE IN THE LAST 3 YEARS  
moved to a new school

THINGS THAT WERE 'LOST'  
being the oldest group in the school

FEELINGS and BEHAVIOURS

COPING

(See example on following page)

Life changes can result in gain and joy as much as loss and grief.

Changes in school in last 3 years	Things that were lost	Feelings and Behaviour	Coping
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moved to a new school</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Being the oldest</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Yelling</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tried to get out of going to school</li> <li>• Joined the school band</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

Emphasise the uniqueness of each person's response. Ensure that you have told students to only write about something they would feel comfortable about somebody else reading / knowing about. Workbooks are not necessarily private documents, and you need to make sure information asked for is okay to be shared.

- Ask students to suggest things could have been lost, and what feelings kids might experience when they move to a new school, for example, anxiety about what would happen. Write these in the Feelings and Behaviours column on the board.
- Ask students to name things people do to cope with moving to a new school. An example of this might be fighting with Mum every morning about going to school. Write these in the Coping column on the board.
- Get students to indicate whether they think the coping mechanism is mostly positive (like you didn't mind going to school early to practise for the band), or mostly negative (changes that resulted in feelings such as sadness or anger, like being sad to leave friends). Put a plus sign beside the entry if positive, or a minus sign beside the entry if negative.
- Ask the students to think about another change in school then fill in their reactions to this change in the columns in the same way. You could ask students to do this individually in their workbooks and then compile them on the board, or you could continue doing another change in the same way with the whole class on the board.

You may want to design a student workbook with some of the activities and information sheets that students can take home and share with their families.

## ACTIVITY 2: Grief reactions

1. Write on the board:  
*CHANGE can result in LOSSES which have negative effects resulting in GRIEF REACTIONS.*
  - Look at the negative effects listed on the board and ask the question, 'what losses could have triggered these effects?'
  - Make the point that not all losses have negative effects.
2. Highlight from student's work or from the board two changes which had positive effects and two changes which had negative effects.
3. Ask the class to suggest what might have helped someone cope with the negative effects.

### Teacher Talk

Most of us have experienced changes in our families in the last three years. How we react depends on many things. We are all individuals. You may have felt differently than your brother or sister, even though you experienced the same changes. Our reactions can also change as time goes by. Sometimes we learn things about ourselves from these changes, especially if the change involves the death of someone close to you or parental separation or divorce.

4. Ask students to complete the following sentence in their workbooks:  
*'Changes in school life and family life can result in feelings of...'*

## ACTIVITY 3: Grief stories

To further explore the reactions to loss you could show the video 'Bolt from the Blue' (21 minutes, available from Film Australia, see Resource list). This video explores the experience of grief and the coping strategies of five young people. Divide the class into five groups and allocate one character to each group. Each group is to report back on their character's response to loss, the things done to cope, and suggestions on how they might help if this person was their friend. An alternate video is 'Inside your feelings: Children dealing with loss and grief' (see Resource list).

# Reactions

## to loss and change

### JUNIOR SECONDARY

## Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- understand that grief reactions involve thoughts, feelings, behaviours and bodily responses.

These activities are intended for use in classrooms which have already established trusting relationships between students and students, and students and teachers.

- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

## Resources

- Butchers' paper — one sheet for however many groups you have (the optimum group size being four to six)
- Drawing pins to display the sheets
- Overhead projector
- *Overhead: Normal grief reactions*
- Optional – coloured dots / stars / pieces of paper for creating groups (you will need as many different colours or types as there are to be groups)

## How to

### ACTIVITY 1: Grief reactions

1. Review last lesson about the positive and negative effects of changes, reminding the class that last lesson they talked about feelings and behaviours as a result of changes and losses. They also talked about experiencing physical sensations like stomachaches, or have thoughts like 'no-one cares about me'.
2. Divide students into groups of four. There are four different activities that can be divided according to the number of groups: either each group does all four activities or each group does a different activity.

You can use dots / stars / coloured pieces of paper to divide the class into groups in a nonthreatening and random way.

#### Taking responsibility

Giving each student a job when they are working in a group helps to develop in them a sense of responsibility and importance. Jobs may include a recorder, timekeeper, monitor, reporter.

#### Group 1

How do you think people's bodies will react? Get the group to draw the outline of a body. In this they are to write bodily reactions to a change that involved loss (for example, headache, heart beating fast).

## Groups

Why do these activities in pairs or groups?

- students find out that they are not alone in their fears
- they get practice in talking with others
- builds social skills
- working with others is a way to energise a class
- brings some fun into the learning challenge.

## In the mind

One technique that people sometimes use when they are finding it hard to cope is to imagine a protective layer between themselves and the hurtful things that are happening. Sometimes people visit a favourite place in their mind to help themselves find strength, confidence or courage.

## Group 2

How do you think people will behave? Get the group to draw different people doing different things to show the behaviour of young people who are grieving (for example, young person throwing something or breaking something).

## Group 3

What feelings might a person experience? Get the group to draw body parts that show feelings people could experience (for example, clenched fist for anger, tears for sadness, arms wrapped around self for fear).

## Group 4

What thoughts might a person have? Get the group to draw a person with a thought bubble. In this bubble they are to record the negative thoughts (what went on inside their heads) people could have as a result of a loss, for example, 'maybe I will die too', or 'no-one will make friends with me'.

3. Display these on the walls. Have one or two people from each group explain their pictures to the class.
4. Using the *Overhead: Normal grief reactions*, talk more about different reactions and how we all experience different combinations of these.
5. Class then suggests positive reactions a young person might show six months after their change that might indicate they were recovering (for example, energy comes back to play with friends, helping someone younger who is sad).



### **Extension activity**

*Enhancing Resilience 1: Coping, session 6, 'Is it the same for boys and girls?'*, explores the cultural pressures and expectations placed on males and females in terms of how they express their needs.



### **A Mental Health Promotion strategy**

Ensure all staff are aware of how to pass on concerns about a student's emotional or mental health



# Normal grief reactions

1

## Emotions

---

Sad  
Frightened  
Guilty  
Hopeless  
Relieved  
Lonely  
Angry

2

## Physical Sensations

---

Pains in chest  
Hollowness in stomach  
Sensitive to noise  
Body feeling detached from the world  
Short of breath  
Feeling weak  
No energy  
Dryness in the mouth

3

## Thoughts

---

I can't believe it  
I'm confused, maybe I'm going mad  
I can't concentrate  
Maybe it was my fault  
It could have been me  
If I think about it, it will make it worse

4

## Behaviours

---

Can't sleep  
Don't feel like eating  
Forgetting things  
Want to be alone  
Dream about your loss  
Go around looking for the person or object  
Sigh a lot  
Can't sit still  
Cry a lot  
Visit places connected with the loss  
Carry objects associated with the loss



This is all normal!

# Reaching out,

## reaching in

### JUNIOR SECONDARY

## Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- identify strategies for coping with their loss experiences, and seeking and accepting support
- explore ways of giving support to friends.

These activities are intended for use in classrooms which have already established trusting relationships between students and students, and students and teachers.

- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

### Expressing needs, feelings or wishes

When people say 'I need...' or 'I feel...' these are called 'I' statements. More commonly people in conflict make 'You' statements which sound more like blame or accusation. Finding out what the other person needs or feels can be a useful strategy, as well as telling about one's own needs or feelings.

'What can we do about this?' is another useful question.

## Resources

- *Information sheet: Helping yourself, helping a friend*
- *Activity sheet: Helping yourself, helping a friend*
- Optional – coloured dots/stars/pieces of paper for creating groups (you will need as many different colours or types as there are to be groups)

## How to

### ACTIVITY 1: How to help

1. Brainstorm in pairs/groups and make a list of things you can do to help yourself/help friends when you/they have been affected by grief.

Have members of the pair /group share the information with the whole class.

2. Hand out the *Information sheet: Helping yourself, helping a friend*, read through it with the class, and then get students to:
  - compare their answers with those on the information sheet, noting those they did not think of
  - place a mark beside those on either list that they think they would be most likely to use.

### **Different people, different reactions**

It is important to normalise the fact that people react differently. What one person finds very stressful may not concern another. One cries, another loses their temper.

### **Extension activity**

For an extension activity see *Enhancing Resilience 2: Stressbusters*, session 2 – Trust: 'Experiential games exploring the role of trust in supportive relationships.'

3. Using the ideas from the group work and information sheet, fill in the *Activity sheet: Helping yourself, helping a friend*. Students can talk about their response with a buddy, in a foursome or as a whole class.
4. As a concluding activity, brainstorm ways they and the school could help a classmate who is returning to school after a week's absence because a parent died.

### **ACTIVITY 2: Helping a friend**

1. In groups, ask students to plan what and how each of the following could do to support someone whose father had died:
  - the class
  - best friends
  - the school.

Share this information with the whole class.



Set up structures for reintegration of students returning to school after bereavement

# Helping yourself, helping a friend



## Helping yourself



- 1 Be prepared to learn about grief, talk to people about it and experience the sad feelings connected with grieving.
- 2 Identify those trusted friends and adults who may be able to support you when you are sad. Practise talking to them about the 'little losses' that make you feel sad and upset.
- 3 Accept that grieving is okay and a normal response to loss.
- 4 Use different ways to manage your grief: write (letters, in a diary, poems, music); draw; be physically active; talk to people, to your pet; create artworks; memory books.
- 5 Find people who have successfully coped with a major loss, read about them or, if possible, talk to them and get them to tell you their story (it will probably help them too).
- 6 Realise that grieving takes time — weeks, months, even years — and it makes you feel tired — physically and emotionally.
- 7 Take time to be with friends, laugh, do something you enjoy.
- 8 Accept help when it is offered. If you want to be alone thank the person for their offer of help, say you want to be alone for now, but tell them a way they could help in the future.

## Helping a friend (or family member)

- 1 Be with your friend, talk to them on the telephone, write them letters (even if they don't write back).
- 2 Make guesses about what might help them. They may not know what will help, and /or may not ask for help. Your guesses may not always work out, but your friend will remember you tried.
- 3 Be prepared to hear the details of the loss a number of times. A grieving person telling and retelling their story is a way for them to understand and accept what has happened.
- 4 Listen without interrupting their talking. The best responses are small comments that show you are listening such as, 'I'm sorry', 'Tell me about that'.
- 5 Remembering good times can be comforting. Ask your friend to tell you about a good time they had with the person; or visit a place with your friend that creates a happy memory; or help them carry out a remembrance ceremony.
- 6 If you are worried about your friend, talk to your parents or another adult about your fears and worries.
- 7 Accept that sometimes your friend will want to talk about their loss and sometimes they will want to act as if it has not happened. Go along with how they are feeling at the time.
- 8 Learn about grief and how to be a supportive friend. Hopefully your friend will recover in time.





# Helping yourself, helping a friend

## Helping yourself

If I am sad I could

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---

---

For me, a good listener is someone who

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---

---

If I moved to a new school I could try to cope by

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---

---

If you lost your favourite CD, which of the following statements would you rather hear?

'Don't worry about it, you can buy a new one.'

or

'It must seem strange not having your favourite music to play.'

Why?

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---

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Name three things you could do to cope if you broke up with your girlfriend / boyfriend

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---

If you went to a friend to talk about a problem, what are three things you would want your friend to say or do?

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Your pet dies. Would you want to get another right away or wait for a while? Why?

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---

---

## Helping a friend

If someone else was sad I could

---

---

---

I could be a good listener by

---

---

---

If my friend was moving to a new school I could try to help them cope with the change by

---

---

---

Your friend's grandmother has died. Which do you think she would rather hear?

'Don't be sad, she was old.'

or

'I know she was old and very sick but I guess you will miss her.'

Why?

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Name three ways your friend could let off steam if they were angry, in ways that wouldn't hurt you or anyone else

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What would you do if a friend had a problem and you really wanted to listen but you didn't want to be late for class?

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How would you help the young child next door whose dog has been run over and killed?

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# Helping

## friends

### JUNIOR SECONDARY

## Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- explore the reactions people have to loss
- be able to identify sources of help.

These activities are intended for use in classrooms which have already established trusting relationships between students and students, and students and teachers.

- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

## Resources

- *Activity sheet: Dear Dr Wright letters*
- *Activity sheet: Newspaper article*

## How to

### ACTIVITY 1: Types of support

1. Recap last lesson and the ways that were identified by students to help themselves and others.
2. Talk about various types of support, referring to the previous lesson and putting the following information on the board. Draw four columns headed: *Support, Example, Source, How helps?*

SUPPORT	EXAMPLE	SOURCE	HOW HELPS?
emotional	getting them to talk about their feelings when they failed to make a team		

You can suggest the following for the first two columns:

- informational support — for example, telling them about a funeral you have attended if they don't know what happens
- practical support — for example, helping your parent with the cleaning
- social support — for example, asking your friend to go with you to help you choose a new CD.

### Brainstorming

A way to generate thinking and collect as many ideas or responses as possible. Do not judge or evaluate offerings during the brainstorm; just gather as many as possible. Return to the list later to complete these other tasks.

3. Fill in column three, brainstorm and record sources of help for each of these areas. Examples might be people or books.
4. Fill in column four, brainstorm and record how this support can help. For example:
  - someone just to listen
  - get some ideas what to do
  - telling someone makes it less frightening
  - gives you a chance to talk about loss and grief involving a person or your pet
  - comforting to talk if you are lonely.
5. Have students create a list of reasons why people don't seek help, that is, barriers to seeking help. Examples include believing it is grown up to cope on your own: don't trust anyone.
6. Discuss these asking if anyone has overcome any one of the barriers?

### **ACTIVITY 2: Giving advice**

1. Distribute *Activity sheet: Dear Dr Wright letters*.
2. Students are to recall the 'reactions to loss' and 'ideas for helping' from the previous lessons. Choose one of the letters and write a response, by themselves or with a partner. In their response they need to indicate:
  - they understand the reactions of the other person
  - who their parent /friend could go to for help and the type of help this person could give
  - acknowledge that their parent /friend may find it difficult to go for help, but give a reason why getting help might be useful.

### ACTIVITY 3: Seeking help

1. Read *Activity sheet: Newspaper article* which describes the death of a teenager's parents in a road accident. List four adults and four young people who might come in contact with the grieving teenager in the next month.
  - What might be the bereaved teenager's responses?
  - What sort of help could the teenager need?
2. Match this help against the help that the four young people and the adults listed might be able to provide.

### ACTIVITY 4: What to say

1. In pairs, one person plays the bereaved teenager, the other person plays one of the young people or adults. The teenager goes to the other person for help. What might be the first thing each person says? Talk as if you were the two people.
2. The teacher then asks questions:
  - How different are you from the teenager?
  - How different are you from the adult?
3. In workbooks students can complete these sentences:
  - My strongest feeling about this situation is...
  - What I have learnt about different people's grief reactions and how they can be helped is...

#### Supportive structures

Use activities from *Enhancing Resilience 2*, for example, Stressbusters session 5 (Supportive structures).

## A Mental Health Promotion strategy



Set up quiet areas for students who need comfort or privacy to deal with upsets



# Dear Dr Wright letters

Sarah is my friend. Last week her father died. When she came back to school she told me, but begged me not to tell anyone else. What should I do?

My friend got into trouble for not having his assignment done. I know it is because his parents have just separated, but he did not want the teacher to know. I think he has been unfairly treated and the teacher should know. What should I do?

My grandmother died and my Dad is very quiet. I miss her terribly. My Dad cries, but won't talk to me about it. This makes me sad. What should I do?

If you think this article would be too upsetting for your students, consider finding an alternative.

## Parents die in road crash

by Jenny Hawkins

Kylie, aged 14, and her brother Bill, aged 16, were being comforted by relatives last night after the sudden death of their parents in a three car accident. Myra and John Fielder were driving along the highway in light rain about 10 p.m. when a car travelling in the opposite direction skidded across in front of the Fielder's car, spinning it around into the path of the car following. The police rescue squad were called to help separate the three vehicles.

Police reported that Mr and Mrs Fielder died on impact. The driver of the car that collided with the Fielders had a blood alcohol reading of 0.10. He was in a satisfactory condition in hospital and was due to be questioned by police. The occupants of the third vehicle, a young couple aged 19 and 20, were released from hospital after receiving treatment for minor cuts and abrasions.

A spokesperson for the Fielder children said Kylie and Bill would stay with relatives for the next few days.

# Feelings

## and fears

### JUNIOR SECONDARY

## Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- explore the basis for common fears and how they relate to fears associated with death.

## Resources

- Overhead projector
- Overhead transparency of *Activity sheet: Similarities and differences in our fears*
- *Activity sheet: Similarities and differences in our fears* — one for every student
- *Activity sheet: My fear* — one for every student

## How to

### ACTIVITY 1: Different fears

1. Recap grief reactions discussed in previous lesson: feelings, thoughts, physical sensations and behaviours. This session focuses on feelings, particularly fears we hold.
2. Have students complete the *Activity sheet: Similarities and differences in our fears*.  
Tally the ratings using an overhead of the student activity sheet. Discuss how the varying results show how some of our fears are the same and some are different.
3. Use the sample questions to guide discussion.

### Sample questions:

- Why is it important in school that teachers and peers understand that people have different fears?
  - Why is it important in families to understand that family members have different fears?
4. Choose a few of the items to explore the basis of the fear experienced. Why are people afraid of:
    - fire (hints: getting burnt and being disfigured, the sound and smell of the fire, the heat)

### Introductory

See teacher professional development section on personal disclosure.

### Relaxation

A guided relaxation exercise is located in the Stressbusters chapter in *Enhancing Resilience: Stress and coping*.

- getting stuck in a lift (hints: suffocating, not knowing the person you are stuck in the lift with, people not knowing where you are, stories you've heard about people left in lifts for hours)
  - moving to a new school (hints: being alone, being with people you don't know, doing the wrong thing).
5. Looking at the items that directly relate to death, ask:  
Are any of the things identified as the basis of fear in the previous discussion the same, for example, superstitions, being alone, doing the wrong thing?
  6. Tell the class that many people probably rated highly the fear of someone in the family dying (the teacher may care to share a fear they have about this), and that we will be looking at the basis for that fear, remembering that we can have reasons that are the same or some that are different.
  7. Write on the board: 'Basis of the fear of someone in the family dying' (responses could include: changes in the family, losing someone who loves you, having no-one to talk to).  
Tell the class that fear is a strong feeling we all have at times in our lives. There are ways we can learn to cope with our fears.
    - Express your feelings to a trusted friend or adult — tell them, write them a letter or email, send them an audiotape.
    - Ask them to help you understand the basis of your fear and find ways to manage your feelings.

### ACTIVITY 2: Ranking fears

1. Using *Activity sheet: My fear*, ask each student to choose three items that ranked high or moderate from *Activity sheet: Similarities and differences in our fears*. They are to pretend that they have told a trusted friend or adult about this fear. Using *Activity sheet: My fear*, write the fear in the first column. In the next column write a response that would not be considered helpful; in the third column write a response that would be helpful.
2. The teacher could give an example from their own fears.
3. Conclude the lesson with some deep breathing and stretches and /or reiterate that our fears are based on our experiences and beliefs, and it's important we accept and support each other's feelings. These feelings are important to the other person and it is desirable for others to understand, but, as we agreed in the beginning, other people's feelings should not be discussed outside this classroom.



# Similarities and differences in our fears

Complete this worksheet by ranking each of the following events, objects or animals using the ranking scale below

**H = High fear, something you avoid in all cases**

**M = Moderate fear, something that causes fear that you avoid if possible**

**L = Low fear, something that causes a little fear, but something you would not avoid**

**N = No fear, something that does not cause fear and you would freely approach**

**Rank**

\_\_\_\_\_ snakes

\_\_\_\_\_ stepladders

\_\_\_\_\_ going to the dentist

\_\_\_\_\_ moving to a new school

\_\_\_\_\_ black cats

\_\_\_\_\_ speaking in front of a group

\_\_\_\_\_ death of a family member

\_\_\_\_\_ surfing

\_\_\_\_\_ spiders

\_\_\_\_\_ seeing a dead body

\_\_\_\_\_ getting into trouble at school

\_\_\_\_\_ fire



**Rank**

\_\_\_\_\_ walking home alone

\_\_\_\_\_ going to a funeral

\_\_\_\_\_ being caught cheating

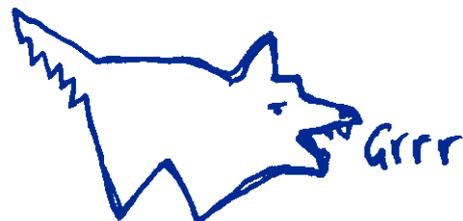
\_\_\_\_\_ having a medical injection

\_\_\_\_\_ large dogs

\_\_\_\_\_ being in a car accident

\_\_\_\_\_ walking in a cemetery

\_\_\_\_\_ parents getting divorced



# My fear



With a buddy, share your responses or talk about fears in general, whatever you feel most comfortable with.

## 1 My fear

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## 2 Unhelpful responses

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## 3 Helpful responses

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# Grief in a

## zoo community: funerals and grief rituals

### JUNIOR SECONDARY

## Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- examine how different practices in communities reflect varying cultural beliefs
- explore varying funeral and grieving practices as they have changed due to time and cultural influences.

## Resources

- *Activity sheet: Tokens of a life in final salute to zoo chief*
- *Activity sheet: Gorillas in mourning over baby's death at zoo*

## How to

### ACTIVITY 1: Exploring grief

1. Explain to the class that the lesson explores the grief experienced in the zoo, over the death of the zoo's director and one of the animals.
2. Read the *Activity sheet: Tokens of a life in final salute to zoo chief*. Answer the sample questions as a class discussion or by students writing the answers in their books.

### Sample questions

- What were the belongings placed on the coffin that symbolised the life of Dr John Kelly?
- What does the phrase 'symbolised the life' mean and how can belongings be seen to symbolise a life?
- Who were the people who actively participated in the funeral?
- Research question: Is this active participation of many people in the service, especially children, a practice that occurs in other cultures or religions? Has it occurred in the funerals of other prominent people?

Telling the story of a funeral could result in resurgence of emotions (see information at the front of this booklet).

Additional information can be found in 'Funeral Service: Secondary School Kit' See Resource list.

Students may have a curiosity about viewing the body or about what happens to a body. For information consult 'Body work'. See Resource list.

#### **Talking about pet loss**

If you feel comfortable with the discussion, allow students to talk about how they felt when a pet died.

#### **Critical incident management**

Teachers need to feel comfortable talking about their school's history and be familiar with the school's critical incident management plan. (see *SchoolMatters* and *Educating for Life*)

Be aware that an activity such as Activity 3 might not be appropriate for some cultural and community groups, and may cause offence.

### **ACTIVITY 2: Funerals**

1. Ask the class:
  - Why do we have funerals?
  - Who has been to a funeral and would be prepared to tell us about it?
  - Discuss the different types of services, for example, at a church, at a crematorium, at a graveside.
  - What are some of the things people do to help friends when someone close to them has died?
2. The newspaper refers to a 'cortege'. What is a cortege? What should drivers on the road do when they see a cortege?
3. Explain to the class: 'It is not only people who grieve in the zoo community, but animals as well'. Read the *Activity sheet: Gorillas in mourning over baby's death at zoo*.
4. Answer the sample questions as a class discussion or by students writing their answers in their books.

#### **Sample questions**

- What evidence is there that the gorillas were grieving the death of the baby?
- What evidence is there that the zoo staff were allowing the gorillas 'time to grieve'?
- Explain why 'the loss of the gorilla made staff sad too'.
- Do you think animals get attached to other animals or people?

### **ACTIVITY 3: Research**

1. The class designs a questionnaire to be used to interview a family member (an elderly relative or a person who has been to a funeral of a different ethnic group). Items that could be included are: the role of the funeral director; the funeral service (people involved, role of children); viewing the body; burial practices; specific customs; expressions of condolence.
2. Compile findings in next lesson.



# Tokens of a life in final salute to zoo chief

## Tokens of a life in final salute to zoo's chief

By RICHARD MADEY

The belongings placed yesterday on the coffin in St Kevin's Catholic Church, Eastwood, symbolised the life of Dr John Kelly, Taronga Zoo's director and chief executive, who died on Saturday, aged 51.

More than 1,000 mourners watched Dr Kelly's son, Patrick, step forward with his father's fishing rod, along with rhubarb and roses plucked from the family's Eastwood garden.

Dr Kelly's eldest daughter, Simone, produced a volume from her father's collection of spy novels and his reading glasses.

His youngest daughter, Kate, offered up his Order of Australia medal. Another daughter, Pip, brought forward his camera and a photograph showing him with the two doctors who helped him through his heart and lung transplant in 1993, all posing with one of Taronga's orang-utans, Archie.

Finally, Dr Kelly's wife, Sue, placed her husband's rosary beads on the coffin.

Brother Brian Berg, one of Dr Kelly's former teachers at St Patrick's College, Strathfield, told the mourners the zoo administrator had once given him the credit for setting him on his career as a veterinarian.

'He told me, "If you hadn't taught chemistry so badly and bored me I would have never gone on to biological science".'

The former Secretary of the Premier's Department, Mr Gerry Gleeson, spoke of how he had recruited Dr Kelly to work for the then Premier, Mr Neville Wran.

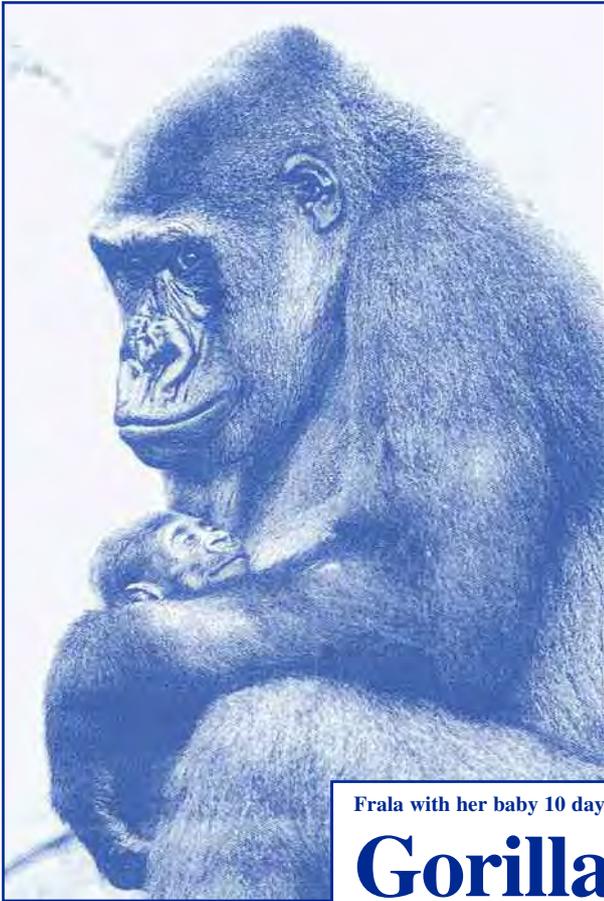
Among the mourners were almost 100 staff from Taronga and Dubbo's Western Plains Zoo, there to farewell their boss: 'He loves his animals but he loved his staff the most,' Mr Gleeson said.

Other mourners included the Minister for the Environment, Ms Allan, a former Environment Minister, Mr Tim Moore, the local MP, Mr Andrew Tink, Labour MLC Mr Johnno Johnson, the two doctors in the picture — heart transplant surgeon Dr Phillip Spratt and cardiologist Dr Anne Keogh — and another heart transplant patient, Ms Fiona Coote.

After the two-hour service, the cortege, led by a police escort, left for the Northern Suburbs Catholic Lawn Cemetery.



# Gorillas in mourning over baby's death in zoo



Frala with her baby 10 days after it was born at Taronga.

Photograph by RICK STEVENS

## Gorillas in mourning over baby's death at zoo

By NADIA JAMAL

A three-week-old gorilla, the first born naturally in Australia, has been found dead in his mother's arms at Taronga Zoo.

Zoo staff said yesterday the cause of death would not be known until after a post-mortem examination later this week.

The western lowland gorilla was discovered by keepers at the zoo on their morning round yesterday.

The deputy director of the Zoological Parks Board of NSW, Mr Glenn Smith, said the infant gorilla had no complications at birth and there was no indication it was suffering from an illness.

It was important to allow the gorilla family time to grieve, he said. The infant gorilla would probably stay in the arms of his mother, Frala, aged 16, for another day or two.

'We are not of the view we should go into the group and physically remove the baby, which would disturb, stress and create anxiety in the group,' he said.

But Mr Smith said the zoo was in a 'catch 22 situation' — the longer the gorilla was with his mother, the less likely they

**It is important and a natural process that gorillas be able to grieve the death of one of their own.**

were of determining from its tissue the exact cause of death.

'Because gorillas share about 97 per cent of the same genetic make-up as human beings, they are susceptible to the same sorts of diseases and infections that humans are,' he said.

In the next few days zoo keepers would attempt to coax the mother to hand over the baby, which would involve trying to encourage her to come forward with food or to gesture for her to place the dead gorilla in an area where keepers could retrieve the body.

The gorilla, which was born during the night on March 7, was the seventh offspring of Kilbabu, the 20-year-old silverback in the gorilla family, who is regarded as an 'excellent' parent.

The 10-strong gorilla family, which arrived at the zoo from Holland in December 1996, included Kilbabu, three adult females and six young gorillas ranging in age from 16 months to six years.

All had witnessed the birth of the infant gorilla, and according to the zoo, were now in the 'grieving process'.

As a result, the family was not on display yesterday outside its home, Gorilla Forest.

Zoo officials said it was unlikely to be seen by the public in the next few days.

'It is important and a natural process that gorillas be able to grieve the death of one of their own,' a spokeswoman for the zoo said yesterday.

She said infant death among gorillas was very high in the first year of life — estimated at up to 40 per cent in the wild and up to 30 per cent in captivity.

Mr Smith said the baby gorilla, whose sex was only determined a few days ago, was yet to be named.

The zoo had hoped to give visitors and the public an opportunity to suggest a name.

The loss of the gorilla had made staff sad, too.

# Loss:

## a universal experience

These activities are intended for use in classrooms which have already established trusting relationships between students and students, and students and teachers.

- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

In order for the students to understand the categories of loss they need to be aware of the changes in their own lives and how feelings of loss accompany these changes.

Students need to be aware that not all the feelings they list will necessarily be negative.

### Community Matters

Chapter 3 explores the social and cultural contexts of many of the issues around loss and grief.

### MIDDLE AND SENIOR SECONDARY

Four key messages that students should have learnt before participating in these sessions:

- people react differently to loss experiences
- there are strategies which help people cope with their own and / or a friend's loss experiences
- everyone needs to be able to identify sources of help
- people from different cultural / ethnic / religious backgrounds may cope with loss in different ways.

These can be addressed by covering some of the activities from sessions 1 to 6.

### Intention

In this lesson it is intended that students:

- be able to describe the categories of loss.

### Resources

- Optional — Coloured dots / stars / pieces of paper for creating groups (you will need as many different colours or types as there are to be groups)
- *Information sheet: Categories of loss* developed by Bertha Simons
- *Activity sheet: Holmes-Rahe survey of recent loss experiences* – for homework

### How to

#### ACTIVITY 1: Change and loss

1. Ask the students to work in groups of four or five to list the sorts of changes that occur in the lives of those around their age. Each group can write their list of changes on butchers' paper or on an overhead transparency. Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.
2. Ask the students to report the changes their group has listed. Ask for one change from each group (asking students not to

repeat a response already given by another group) and continue this process until each group has exhausted their list.

3. Compare changes the students listed with those listed in the *Information sheet: Categories of loss*.

### ACTIVITY 2: Feelings

1. Reform groups. Ask the students to try and think of the feelings associated with the four categories of changes. Make a list of the feelings.
2. Ask the students to report back using the same process as the first group activity.
3. Briefly discuss the range of feelings expressed. Look for similarities and differences between the groups such as gender differences. At this point draw attention to the positive feelings expressed and recognise that good feelings tend not to cause us a problem. We do not tend to seek help because we are happy!
4. Delete the positive feelings from the lists they developed in task 2. What we now have listed are what we can describe as grief reactions and these will be explored in the next lesson.

You may want to distinguish between thoughts and feelings.

Keep these lists for use in the next lesson.

## Homework

Ask the students to work on the *Activity sheet: Holmes-Rahe survey of recent loss experiences* at home with parents or caregivers to identify life events experienced as a family. Bring their responses to the next lesson. The aim of this is to try to establish how much change has occurred in the families of the students.

If this survey is not appropriate for your group of students, consider using the following alternative:

- In pairs, brainstorm examples of loss.
- Allot up to 100 points for each event.
- Create a class survey of the results.
- Individual students add up their own scores.
- Discuss help-seeking strategies for 'high scores'.

### Referral

If you are concerned about a student in your class, follow-up afterwards. Talk to the student. Refer the matter to the welfare teacher. Continue to monitor.

### A Mental Health Promotion strategy

Provide access to counsellors for students and staff dealing with the impact of family separation



# Categories of loss

Loss has been grouped into four major categories:

## **THE LOSS OF A SIGNIFICANT PERSON**

## **THE LOSS OF A PART OF THE SELF**

## **THE LOSS OF EXTERNAL OBJECTS**

## **DEVELOPMENTAL LOSS**

While these losses are listed in the various categories, there is considerable overlap and one loss often impinges on another; as a result the distinctions between categories tend to blur.

### **1. Loss of a significant person**

Death of a loved one — the ultimate loss, final and complete; also desertion, separation, divorce, abortion, stillbirth.

### **2. Loss of part of the self**

#### **a. Physical — structural and functional.**

Structural loss: loss of a limb, loss of an organ, disfigurement, loss of hair, loss of teeth, any outward change, loss of body image (through surgery, burns, accident).

Functional loss: loss through stroke, paralysis, deafness, blindness, arthritis, infertility.

#### **b. Psychological — loss of memory, judgement, pride, control, status, usefulness, independence, esteem, values, ideas.**

#### **c. Social — loss of roles, employment, friends; geographic moves, travel.**

#### **d. Community and cultural — loss through immigration, urban renewal, refugee experience.**

### **3. Loss of external objects**

Loss of possessions — money, jewels, property, and 'symbols of identity'— such as photographs and artefacts, through burglary, robbery and natural disasters, such as floods and fire.

### **4. Developmental loss**

Birth trauma, weaning, growing up, school, exam failures, school-to-work transition, leaving home, new relationships, marriage, old age, multiple cumulative losses.

### **Community Matters**

Chapter 3 expands on what loss can be for young people in particular circumstances.

# The Holmes-Rahe survey of recent loss experiences



Read the events listed below, and circle the number next to any event that has occurred in your life recently. There are no right or wrong answers. The aim is just to help identify which of these events you have experienced lately. A recent event is one which you think is still affecting you.

<b>LIFE EVENTS</b>	<b>LIFE CHANGE UNITS (LCUs)</b>
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Jail term	63
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Fired at work	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Change in health of family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sex difficulties	39
Gain of new family member	37
Change to different line of work	36
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35
Mortgage over \$30 000	31
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Change in responsibilities at work	29
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Partner begins or stops work	26
Begin or end school	26
Change in living conditions	25
Revision of personal habits	24
Trouble with boss	23
Change in work hours or conditions	20
Change in residence	20
Change in schools	20
Change in recreation	19
Change in church activities	19
Change in social activities	18
Mortgage or loan less than \$30 000	17
Change in sleeping habits	16
Change in number of family get-togethers	15
Change in eating habits	15
Vacation	13
Christmas	12
Minor violations of law	11
<b>Total</b>	

Now add up the numbers you have circled to obtain your total life change units score.

(Based on Worksheet 17 Glasscock, G. & Rowling L. (1992) *Learning to grieve – Life Skills for Coping with Losses*. Newtown, Millennium Books)

# Grief

## is normal

### MIDDLE AND SENIOR SECONDARY

## Intention

In this lesson it is intended that students:

- identify normal grief reactions.

These activities are intended for use in classrooms which have already established trusting relationships between students and students, and students and teachers.

- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

## Resources

- *Activity sheet: Normal grief reactions*

## How to

### ACTIVITY 1: Change and stress

1. Review content covered in previous lesson, such as the changes experienced by the students and the feelings of loss associated with those changes. Revisit the lists of grief reactions from the previous lesson.
2. Ask the students to share with the group the changes they identified on the Holmes-Rahe Survey. Some issues that could be discussed at this stage could include whether the family members discussed their own personal reactions to change and whether individual family members' scores differed.
3. Explain that the LCU only gives an indication of the amount of stress a person is likely to experience. A score of 300 or more indicates there is a high degree of stress; between 200 and 300, a reasonable degree of stress; 200 or below, a limited amount of stress. Explain to students that we need to remember that stress is associated with loss and therefore grief.
4. If a student scores more than 300, remind them that this scale is only an *indication* of stress and that people react differently to events. How stressful the event experienced is also depends on the support received from family, friends and the school.

### Privacy

Some students may be reluctant to share the results of this survey and their privacy needs to be respected.

Respect students' rights to privacy. They may be more comfortable sharing with a buddy.

5. Ask students to recall the changes they had originally listed and the feelings that accompanied those changes. Ask students to respond to these questions on a sheet of paper.
  - What did you do with those feelings or how did you behave?
  - What kind of messages did you receive from your families?
  - Do you think people understood your feelings?
  - What would you have liked people to say?

Ask students to share their responses with the class.

6. Show the *Activity sheet: Normal grief reactions*. For anyone disturbed by their reactions, this list will provide a means for normalising their experience.

### **Teacher talk: Change and loss**

Explain to students that change and loss often involve crisis. In Chinese, 'crisis' stands for danger and opportunity. Ask the class to identify any positive outcomes of their changes.

Remind students that if they have become upset by thinking and talking about these things, they can discuss this with you, the school counsellor, the pastoral care teacher and others. They need to feel that they can access support if they need it.

## **A Mental Health Promotion strategy**

Invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers to talk with staff members to increase staff understanding of grief pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and how to deal with upsets that manifest in the classroom



# Normal grief reactions

## **1** EMOTIONS

Anxiety and fear  
Sad  
Guilt  
Angry  
Inadequacy  
Hurt  
Relieved  
Loneliness

## **2** PHYSICAL SENSATIONS

Hollowness in stomach  
Tightness in chest  
Oversensitivity to noise  
A sense of depersonalisation  
Breathlessness  
Weakness of muscles  
Lack of energy  
Dry mouth

## **3** COGNITIONS

Disbelief  
Confusion  
Preoccupation  
Sense of presence of bereaved  
Hallucinations

## **4** BEHAVIOURS



This is all normal!

Sleep disturbances  
Appetite disturbances  
Absent-minded behaviours  
Social withdrawal  
Dreams of the deceased  
Avoiding reminders of the deceased  
Searching and calling out  
Sighing  
Restless overactivity  
Crying  
Visiting places and carrying objects  
that remind the survivor of the  
deceased  
Treasuring objects that belonged to  
the deceased

# Understanding

## loss in response to death

These activities are intended for use in classrooms which have already established trusting relationships between students and students, and students and teachers.

- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

Allow the discussion to be reasonably free but still focused on the categories and why they think they fit these categories.

### MIDDLE AND SENIOR SECONDARY

## Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- discuss the various ways people die
- identify the likely grief responses to expected and unexpected death.

## Resources

- Collect a whole range of material which helps the students gain an awareness of the different kinds of death that are reported. The material could include such things as death notices in the daily press, any major accidents, catastrophic events, war items, suicides, murders, child and adolescent deaths, reports of children dying, and people with AIDS and other life threatening illnesses. Try to make the materials as broad as possible. It may be appropriate to ask the students during the previous week to collect this material.
- *Information sheet: Determinants of grief*
- *Optional* — coloured dots/stars/pieces of paper for creating groups (you will need as many different colours or types as there are to be groups)

## How to

### ACTIVITY 1: Different deaths

1. Divide students into groups of four or five. Distribute the materials that have been collected about different kinds of death so that each group has a range of topics. Ask the students to read the materials in their groups.
2. Ask the class: Is there any way in which we could categorise these deaths? List student responses on the board.

3. Suggest to students that one means of categorisation could be *mode of death*. Categories include: natural, accidental, suicidal, homicidal. Explain that each of these kinds of death will bring quite different grief reactions.

### **ACTIVITY 2: Determinants of grief**

1. Handout *Information sheet: Determinants of grief*. Explain each of the major points on the overhead, allowing students to question and discuss the issues raised. Use the *Teacher information sheet: Determinants of grief* to assist you.
2. Revisit the materials distributed at the start of the lesson. Students are to select one item from the materials. Ask the students to consider the factors associated with the loss reported and suggest how this would impact on the grief reactions of those that knew the person.



### **A Mental Health Promotion strategy**

Work with local religious, cultural and community groups to find out how schools can support a bereaved student



A number of factors will determine a person's response to a loss

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These include:

- who the person was
- the nature of the attachment
  - a. strength of the attachment
  - b. security of the attachment
  - c. uncertainty of the importance of the relationship
  - d. conflicts with the deceased
- mode of death
- history of losses
- individual characteristics
- social environment factors
- concurrent stresses.



# Determinants of grief

## TEACHER INFORMATION SHEET

The Parkes and Weiss, Harvard Bereavement Study 1983, endeavoured to identify the likely ways in which people would respond to a major loss.

A number of factors will determine the person's response. Among these will be the age and the stage of life cycle of the person who has died and of the grieving person. The study revealed the following factors:

### **Who the person was**

To predict how a person might respond to a major loss through death, we need to know the relationship the person had to the dead person, for example, parent, friend, child, sibling, lover, grandparent.

### **The nature of the attachment**

How strong was the relationship or how attached were they to the deceased person?

- a. strength of the attachment — how much did they love the person?
- b. security of the attachment — to what extent was the deceased person important for their ongoing sense of security and self-esteem?
- c. uncertainty of the importance of the relationship — while some degree of mixed feelings is normal in any relationship, if the negative feelings are stronger, the surviving person is likely to have more difficulty in resolving the grief.
- d. conflicts with the deceased — where a history of conflict has been part of the relationship (especially physical and / or sexual abuse) difficulty in resolving the grief can be expected.

### **Mode of death**

Grief reactions will be related to how the person died. The method of categorisation was referred to earlier: natural, accidental, suicidal, homicidal. As might be expected, it is more difficult to resolve grief associated with accidental and unexpected death than with a natural death. Similarly, suicide and murder create quite different and often disturbing grief reactions. Because this is such an important issue it is dealt with in an extension lesson for teachers who want to spend more time on this issue.

### **History of losses**

What previous experience with loss has the grieving person and how have they coped? Do they have a history of mental illness, particularly depression? This can be related to the Holmes-Rahe Survey of Recent Experiences (Lesson 8). The greater number of changes, the more difficult the resolution of the loss.

### **Individual characteristics**

The age and sex of the person and their personality type — how do they cope with stressful events? Are they a dependent person? Do they express their feelings freely? People with particular personality disorders will have a more difficult time and perhaps need specialised help.

### **Social environment factors**

The social group to which the person belongs, with its cultural attitudes to grief, rituals for mourning, ethnic and religious variables; the support networks available to the mourner; possibility of the secondary gain from being a mourner, making it hard to 'let go' of the role.

### **Concurrent stresses**

Where a high level of disruption occurs following a death, for example, economic reversals, moving house, school and so on.

(Based on Worksheet 17, Glassock, G. & Rowling L. (1992) *Learning to grieve – Life Skills for Coping with Losses* Newtown, Millennium Books)

# Supporting

## grieving friends and relatives

These activities are intended for use in classrooms which have already established trusting relationships between students and students, and students and teachers.

- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

Some students may be reluctant to share their responses and their privacy needs to be respected.

### MIDDLE AND SENIOR SECONDARY

## Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- identify strategies they can employ to be supportive to grieving people
- identify possible differences in grieving patterns between males and females.

This session may need to be taught over two lessons.

## Resources

- Song 'I Will Survive' Gloria Gaynor (or current song with similar message)
- *Information sheet: Unhelpful strategies*
- *Information sheet: Guidelines for being a supportive person*

## How to

### ACTIVITY 1: Grief reactions

1. Review with the class people's grief reactions from session 9. Ask the class to think of a loss experience that affected them greatly and to recall the following list of coping behaviours. These can be reviewed from session 3, *Information sheet: Helping yourself, helping a friend*:

- talking to others
- talking it through by myself
- crying
- through the support of friends
- accepted it as time passed
- kept busy
- developed new relationships
- family support
- religious beliefs
- by writing or drawing about my feelings
- by philosophical beliefs.

### Privacy

Some students may be reluctant to share their responses and their privacy needs to be respected.

Refer to 'Gender differences in adolescent loss reactions, and coping styles' (in the information section in the front of this booklet).

2. Invite the class to write down on their sheets, any coping behaviours they employed. Collate class responses. If it is a mixed gender class, discuss whether gender differences have appeared in the collation of the class's responses.

Explain the following information in terms of male and female grieving patterns.

### Teacher talk

Research has identified different grieving patterns for males and females.

In general, males tend to look at losses involving interpersonal relationships in a problem-solving way: that is, males tend to try to find answers to their grief, whereas females react by exploring their feelings and therefore look for someone to listen to them.

Society tends to focus more on females who are grieving because of the form their grief takes. Males can be overlooked. They may need to be helped to work through their grief in behavioural rather than verbal ways, yet still be encouraged to deal with feelings. The feelings include the reality of the loss: the failure to explore feeling can prolong grief. Conversely, females may need help with problem-solving. Thus, the grief processes of males and females may be different, not the feelings. There may also be cultural differences.

### ACTIVITY 2: Masculine and feminine grieving patterns

1. Divide the class into small groups of three or four, each group having at least one male and one female (if this is a mixed class). Ask the class to discuss the above findings in relation to their own experiences with grieving people. After allowing adequate time for discussion, invite the class to share their thoughts on gender differences in grieving patterns.
2. Explain to the class that when interacting with a grieving person, there are strategies that should be avoided as they have been found to be unhelpful. Distribute *Information sheet: Unhelpful strategies*. Go through this and discuss it with the class.

3. After this, point out to the class that many factors can vary these guidelines, things such as:
  - the context of the statement
  - what a grieving person expects from the support network
  - the types of support available (like informational, social, emotional, practical)
  - when the particular type of support is offered, that is, people have different needs at different times in their grieving.
4. Invite the class to share any experiences they have had that are similar to those identified.
5. Inform the class that there are things that can be done to support grieving people. Distribute *Information sheet: Guidelines for being a supportive person*. Go through this and discuss with students.
6. Say that human beings are enormously resilient and, with support, can overcome great crises. Play the song 'I Will Survive' by Gloria Gaynor. Ask the class to identify the grief response of the singer, that is, how she responds to her broken love affair. What was it that made the singer 'a survivor'?

## A Mental Health Promotion strategy



Provide pastoral care and personal development for all students



# Unhelpful strategies

**1. Avoidance behaviours** refusing to bring up the subject, or avoiding the person

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**2. Directives** 'You will have to be the head of the family now'; 'You will have to get control of yourself'

---

**3. Forcing behaviour** being pressured to talk about it, being pressured into new relationships

---

**4. Judging** 'Why are you acting this way?'; 'don't take it so hard'

---

**5. Suggesting full understanding** 'I know exactly how you feel'

---

**6. Comparing losses** 'At least it's not as bad as...'

---

**7. Random judgements** 'It's for the best'; 'She's better off now'

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**8. God's needs** 'It was God's will'; 'God needed him in heaven'

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(Adapted from Glasscock, G. & Rowling L (1992) *Learning to Grieve – Life Skills for Coping with Losses* Newtown, Millennium Books, pg 105.)

# Guidelines for being a supportive person



- Accept feelings no matter what they are or how unusual they appear.
- Maintain predictability and stability in the environment.
- Accept silences without filling them with words.
- Use physical touch if acceptable when words seem inappropriate.
- Encourage expression of emotion.
- Adopt an understanding and empathetic attitude that encourages expression of thoughts and feelings.
- Refrain from: giving advice; telling them what to feel; telling them what to think; or insisting the person talk about their loss.
- Accept that you cannot stop the bereaved's feelings of loss, but you can help the bereaved name and express the pain the loss causes.

**Your gift to the bereaved is yourself.  
Grieving people remember most what you  
choose to be, not what you choose to say.**

- **Be there.**
- **Listen.**
- **Allow and encourage expression of feeling.**
- **Give non-verbal support when appropriate.**



# Controversial issues:

## the way people die

These activities are intended for use in classrooms which have already established trusting relationships between students and students, and students and teachers.

- Always make allowance for students to 'opt out' if they feel too uncomfortable.
- Allow for sufficient time at the end to debrief.
- Remember that teachers need to look after themselves as well.

If students raise the issue of suicide in this lesson, teachers should be prepared to respond appropriately. Information about how to respond is provided in *Educating for Life*.

### SENIOR SECONDARY

Four key messages that students should have learnt before participating in these sessions:

- people react differently to loss experiences
- there are strategies which help people cope with their own and /or a friend's loss experiences
- everyone needs to be able to identify sources of help
- people from different cultural / ethnic / religious backgrounds may cope with loss in different ways.

**Lessons 7 to 10 should be taught before commencing 11 to 12.**

### Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- explore the ethical dilemmas, beliefs and personal values that influence decisions about life and death.

### Resources

- The school's suicide policy (should be read before embarking on this lesson; also read *Educating for Life*)
- Optional — coloured dots / stars / pieces of paper for creating groups (you will need as many different colours or types as there are to be groups)

### How to

#### ACTIVITY 1: Defining euthanasia

1. Explain to students that the decisions people make about their lives and deaths create controversy in society. They also impact on the lives of others. To explore these issues euthanasia will be used as a case study.
2. Write the definitions of euthanasia on the board.
3. Voluntary euthanasia is where a patient makes a conscious decision that his / her life should end and asks for help to do this.

#### Teacher talk

Passive euthanasia is where a decision is made to forgo or cease treatment which is considered burdensome or unnecessarily prolonging life.

## ACTIVITY 2: Discussion

1. In small groups get the class to discuss the sample questions and report back.

### Sample questions

- Why might someone ask for help to take their own life?
  - Why might they think life is too much?
  - What is depression and why do people become depressed? What role could it play in voluntary euthanasia? (see *Understanding Mental Illness* unit)
  - Why might an ill person refuse treatment?
  - How might friends or relatives feel when someone has taken their life by euthanasia?
  - What are three things that could make a person who is contemplating euthanasia feel better? (Hints: talking to a counsellor / priest; having their medication reviewed for greater pain relief; moving to a palliative care ward)
  - Why does society find it difficult to talk about euthanasia? (focus on personal and community values)
2. Reinforce the message that a positive self-image can be a protective factor. Individually get students to complete the following sentence stems and then share any they feel comfortable doing so, with their group.
    - The things in my life that make me feel fully alive are \_\_\_\_
    - I could increase these positive experiences by \_\_\_\_
    - The things I do well are \_\_\_\_
    - Other people tell me I am good at \_\_\_\_
    - If I am feeling depressed, three things I could do are \_\_\_\_

#### Guest speakers

Invite a person from a palliative care unit to talk to the class

## A Mental Health Promotion strategy

Raise staff awareness of mental health problems for young people

# Responding

## to help seeking

### UPPER SECONDARY

Sessions 7 to 10 should be taught or reviewed before commencing this session.

Four key messages that students should have learnt before participating in these lessons:

- people react differently to loss experiences
- there are strategies which help people cope with their own and / or a friend's loss experiences
- everyone needs to be able to identify sources of help
- people from different cultural / ethnic / religious backgrounds may cope with loss in different ways.

### Intention

In this lesson it is intended that students:

- identify clues in an individual's behaviour that suggest a need for help
- identify the possible thoughts and feelings of someone who is feeling down
- devise strategies for helping a friend who is feeling down
- identify agencies and individuals that help young people with mental health problems.

### Resources

- *Teacher information sheet: Questions about suicide*
- *Overhead: A friend might need help when...*
- *Overhead: What can you do to help?*
- *Educating for Life: a guide for school-based responses to preventing self-harm and suicide*

This session is for use if a student raises the issue of how to support a depressed friend. The focus should be on help-seeking. Suicide may be raised. Refer to *Educating for Life: a guide for school-based responses to preventing self-harm and suicide* before teaching this session.

Teachers should be familiar with the school / system policy on suicide before teaching this lesson. This is an extension lesson.

Refer to the *Understanding Mental Illnesses* booklet.

# How to

## Teacher talk

Inform the class that today's session will focus on responding to someone who is down and may need help, and will focus on how to respond should someone you know appear to be at risk. Sometimes, particularly if someone is depressed, a loss or change in their life may make it difficult for them to cope. They may even have thoughts of suicide.

Suicide is always associated with mental health problems such as depression. These problems are treatable and can be resolved.

Remind students that as this can be a sensitive or worrying issue for some people, they may wish to talk with you after class about a concern or a worry about themselves or someone else. Remind them about who else is available to talk to should they wish to approach someone else instead.

Further information about depression can be found in the *Understanding Mental Illnesses* booklet.

A suicide attempt or completed suicide may be better understood as an attempt to end the pain rather than to end life.

### Questions about suicide

Use the *Teacher information sheet: Questions about suicide* to guide your responses should students ask questions about how best to respond if a friend reveals an intention to suicide or self-harm.

## ACTIVITY 1: A friend in need

1. Ask the class to identify what they think might be some of the warning signs that someone is feeling down.
2. When would you get worried about a friend? Conduct a brainstorm.
3. Compare the brainstorm with the *Overhead: A friend might need help when...*
4. Explain that these situations do not always mean someone is dealing with a personal problem or encountering tough times. Sometimes we have to back our instincts about when others need help or support as a lot of people believe they should try to cope on their own, or feel a sense of shame or shyness about talking about their own worries. Other people do not know that they may be experiencing depression. Up to 24 percent of young people can experience depression by the time they are 18-years-old. Young people may not know that help is available.

Link here with *MindMatters* booklet *Understanding Mental Illnesses* section on depression.

See *SchoolMatters* and *Educating For Life: a guide for school-based responses to preventing self-harm and suicide*.

## ACTIVITY 2: What can you do to help?

1. Look at *What can you do to help* handout / overhead.
2. Use the 'What If?' questions below to examine what a friend could do. Choose scenarios relevant to your class for discussion.
  - What if a friend has been staying at your house a lot lately and says they would like to drop out of school and run away?
  - What if a friend who was injured in a car accident six months ago has become very quiet and withdrawn. He cannot participate in sport and stays at home alone in his room a great deal?
  - What if you suspect a friend is depressed and may think of hurting themselves, but have never talked about it? Should you bring up the topic or tell them you are worried about them?
  - What if a boyfriend or girlfriend says they will kill themselves if you break up with them?
  - What if a friend tells you that they want to kill themselves and asks you not to tell anyone?
  - What if someone in your group is smoking marijuana on weeknights as well as on the weekend? Others in the group are making jokes about this person turning into a space cadet. He seems pretty down to you.
  - What if a friend tells you that they are thinking of ending it soon? Should you give it until the next day to see if they feel better or should you tell someone?
3. Use the following principles in your discussion as appropriate:
  - if you are worried, tell an appropriate adult
  - if you're not sure what to do, ask for advice from an experienced adult (for example, a counsellor)
  - don't take on the job of being the counsellor — get help
  - take all threats and warnings or hints to self-harm seriously and pass them on
  - if you suspect your friend is really down, do ask them about how they are feeling

- if they don't want to talk about it, pass on your concern to someone who could intervene
- don't make a promise to keep suicidal thoughts or plans a secret
- if you have made a promise, understand it is important to break it if someone's life may be at risk
- suicide is not a good choice, anyone contemplating it should get a chance to be helped to find a better solution
- alcohol and drug use can be associated with an attempt; if someone is affected by drugs / alcohol and feeling down, they may make a decision which affects their safety — be aware you may need to call for help
- most people who suicide send hints for help beforehand
- suicide or a suicide attempt is almost always associated with mental health problems, such as depression, which are treatable and can be resolved.

#### Getting help

You may wish to use session 4 from Coping in *Enhancing Resilience 2* as a help-seeking activity.

Remember to tell the school counsellor or welfare staff that a discussion about suicide has occurred in the class.

### ACTIVITY 3: Getting help

1. Students do a mapping exercise of people and services available to help in their school, local community, city and / or region.

(Remind students that they may need to know how to look for help for someone else at some time in the next few years, after they have left the school.)

2. Conclude the lesson by acknowledging that what has been discussed today is a sensitive issue. Tell the class that if anyone is feeling upset, disturbed or anxious as a result of what was talked about, or if they have noticed that any of their friends seem disturbed, they should talk to you before leaving the room, or to a trusted adult.

## A Mental Health Promotion strategy

Increase staff awareness of school's suicide prevention guidelines



# A friend might need help when...

- they have experienced a relationship break up or recent loss
- they have a change of lifestyle
- they are reporting feeling continually depressed or anxious
- the standard of their school work is deteriorating
- they express feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- they talk about suicide
- there are changes in their sleep patterns
- they have withdrawn from family and friends
- they are staying away from school, work or other usual activities
- they complain a lot of headaches, nausea or unexplained fatigue
- there appears to be a loss of self-esteem
- they feel they can't cope anymore with life's challenges.

(from Glassock, G. & Rowling L. (1992) *Learning to grieve – Life Skills for Coping with Losses* Newtown, Millennium Books, pg 108)

# What can you do to help?



- don't avoid talking about it
- take their discussion about feeling down seriously
- pass on your concerns to an adult who can help
- let friends know where they can get support
- offer to accompany them to access support
- show the person they have choices besides self-harm, even though none of them may seem ideal at that time.

(from Glassock, G. & Rowling L. (1992) *Learning to Grieve – Life Skills for Coping with Losses* Newtown, Millennium Books, pg 108)



# Questions about suicide

## Teacher information sheet

Suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst youth and young adults. Each year more than 500 people between the ages of 15 and 24 die as a result of suicide. Only accidents claim more lives.

**Question:**

*Is the best way to help a person who says they don't want to live to assure them that things will get better and to be patient?*

**No.** Giving false assurances will not help, and may make the person feel more guilty and worthless. You cannot assure that things will get better although you can let the person know that often things do, and that you believe in their ability to get through their difficult time. It is much better to listen to what the person has to say and find out why they feel so bad.

**Question:**

*If a person tells you that he or she wants to kill themselves and tells you not to tell anyone, should you keep this information to yourself so you can show the person you can be trusted and that they have a friend in you?*

**No.** You may have to betray a confidence to save a life. Even if you promised not to tell, it is important that you do. This is too big a responsibility to carry alone. Besides, most people who tell others are really asking for help. Even if you know it will infuriate the person, you must tell a responsible person as quickly as possible. If the person you tell doesn't take you seriously, and you feel it is serious, tell someone else. Even if you're embarrassed because nothing happened, you did not do wrong by telling. A person who says they want to kill themselves needs help.

**Question:**

*Is it true that only a few people who talk about suicide or make plans for suicide actually attempt it?*

**No.** Most of the young people who have attempted or have committed suicide have given verbal clues of their intentions. According to research, adolescents almost always tell of their plans to kill themselves. Sometimes, they do so in direct ways, 'I can't take any more, I'm going to kill myself', and sometimes they give indirect or hidden messages such as, 'They'll be sorry when I've gone', or 'I won't be a problem

to you much longer'. These people need professional help.

**Question:**

*Are helplessness and hopelessness the two strongest indicators that a person may be or become suicidal?*

**Yes.** Helplessness and hopelessness leave a person with no energy for the present or hope for the future. These two symptoms often mean the person is at high risk and needs attention and support.

**Question:**

*If you thought there was an immediate suicide danger, should you leave the person and go for help straight away?*

**No.** Do not leave a person alone who you think is in immediate danger of killing themselves. Stay with the person or find someone else to stay with them until the crisis passes or until help arrives. If you can't get help in another way, you may have to call the hospital emergency room, crisis hotline, or even the police.

**Question:**

*Is one of the best responses to someone saying 'I can't take any more, I think I'm going to kill myself' to stay calm and ask the person to tell you why they feel that way?*

**Yes.** Stay calm and communicate this calmness as best you can. Don't argue or try to prove that the person is acting irrationally or isn't thinking straight. This will only aggravate the situation. Listen and sympathise with the person. Encourage the person to talk with you.

**Question:**

*Once someone decides they want to kill themselves is there really any way to stop them?*

**Yes.** Many suicides have been prevented. Most adolescents who think about suicide or have tried it admit later that they didn't want to die – they just didn't want to hurt. Assume the person wants to live even if for the moment the desire is a 'still, small voice'.

**Question:**

*Should suicide attempts of any kind always be considered a cry of pain or can people just be trying to get attention?*

**Yes.** Consider them to be a cry of pain.

# Resource list

## **Selected Bibliography**

(See also *MindMatters* annotated bibliography webpage:  
[www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters.](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters.))

Glassock, G. & Rowling L. (1992)  
*Learning to grieve — Life skills for coping with losses* Newtown, Millenium Books  
(text with lessons for junior and senior secondary students)

McKissock, M. & McKissock, D. (1993)  
*Coping with grief* Sydney Australian Broadcasting Comission (concise account of grief reactions)

Nelson-Feaver, P. (1993)  
*Funeral service secondary school teaching kit* Victoria, Australian Funeral Directors  
(text with lessons for secondary students)

Raphael, B. (1985)  
*Anatomy of Bereavement: A handbook for the caring professions*  
(text for teachers)

Stevenson, R.G. & Stevenson, E.P. (1996)  
*Teaching about death: A comprehensive resource for educators and parents*  
Philadelphia: Charles Press  
(text for teachers)

Worden, W. (1991)  
*Grief counselling and therapy*  
2nd ed. New York: Springer  
(text on bereavement counselling)

Yang, W. & Pip, C. (1990)  
*Bodywork: Confessions from the funeral trade* Sydney, Hale and Iremonger  
(teacher background information on the funeral trade)

## **Resources Groups**

Film Australia  
PO Box 46  
Lindfield NSW 2070  
Tel: 02 9413 8770  
(for video 'Bolt from the Blue')

Rose Education Pty Ltd  
7 Bonnie Field Close  
Catherine Field NSW 2171  
Tel: 02 9606 6853  
(resources and training on suicide)

Seasons for Growth International Office.  
PO Box 1023  
North Sydney 2059  
Tel: 02 8912 4844  
(grief support program)

Video Education Australasia  
111A Mitchell St  
Bendigo 3550  
Tel: 1800 034282  
(for video 'Inside your Feelings: Children dealing with loss and grief')



*friendship*  
*mates*  
*together*  
*companionship*  
*acceptance*  
*belonging*

