

THE HEART OF US

Grief & Loss

A beginning guide



Photo: Karen Curran



*A beginning guide to help
recognise and find a way to live
with grief or loss*

Karen Curran



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This booklet is for anyone - adult or child - who is suffering from a loss of any kind and the associated grief

Definition

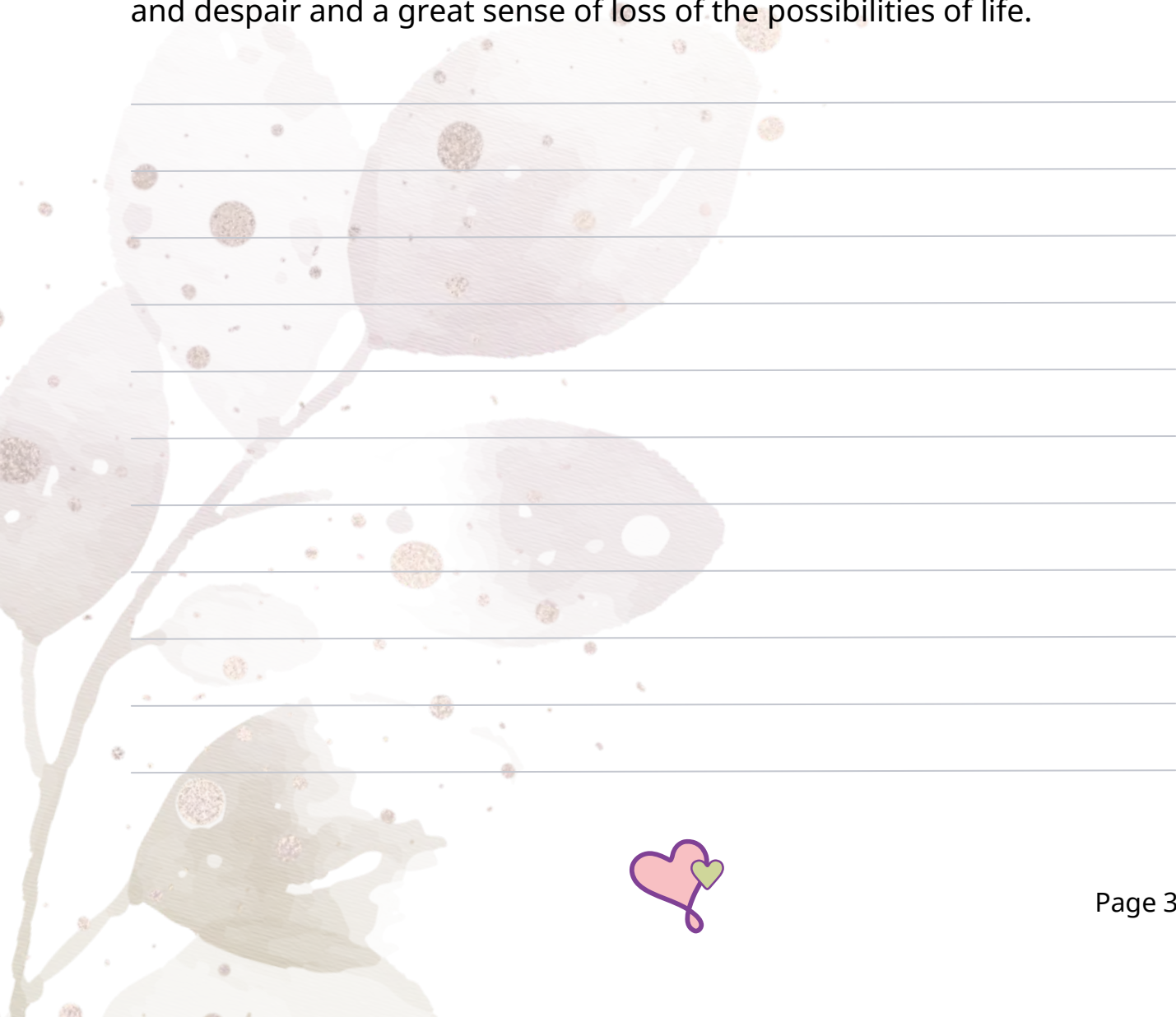
LOSS 'the feeling of grief after losing someone or something of value' (Oxford Dictionary)

They may often be a 'loss of words' - with the person feeling unable to articulate how they feel, nor wishing to.

GRIEF 'intense sorrow, especially caused by someone's death'.

OR

Grief may also be felt by a person with a serious, long-term illness or with a terminal illness. It may include feelings of great sadness, anger, guilt, and despair and a great sense of loss of the possibilities of life.





Did you know?

Years ago there was a focus on the stages of grief. That is no longer considered the best approach. Grief is now **person-centred** because each person has influences, beliefs and styles according to their own circumstances and cultural background. Stages of grief are no longer a 'given'.

We are encouraged to continue bonds with loved ones, but in a new way that is supportive, balanced and comfortable in the present.

Again this is individual.

There are four identified categories of loss*:

- **Relationship loss** (loved ones - loved pets)
- **Loss of some aspect of self** - no longer being able to dance, play music, teach, create or be able to speak up for themselves and so on.
- **Developmental Changes** - losses in life, moving, new stage of life, change of life etc.
- **Loss of treasured objects or mementos** - this often happens in separation, divorce, 'acts of God', weather, war, disaster, moving away and so on.

* Humphrey and Zimpfer (2008)



Other responses

There are also **physical, psychological, behavioural, social and spiritual reactions** to grief.

There is often anger.

Grief lies under anger. This is where talking to a compassionate person or counsellor can be helpful.

Faith is questioned, lost, or disowned. Or, even found.

Each person may have some, or all of these responses.

There is no definitive way. And there is no definitive time period when it happens.

What is best for the person is what they should feel to do with what comes up in the moment.

Medical/health

There may also be times where medical support may be necessary for a short time, and there should be no shame attached to this.

Again, it is what is best for the individual.



Ways to share loss with children ...

When speaking to a young person, the following may be helpful ...

There is a time for every season.

And each person, animal and living thing has a time.

Some of us have very long lives.

Sometimes others have shorter times here on earth.

Sometimes people we care about may have a serious illness called cancer, or dementia or something like that.

That does not mean you are going to have that. It is not catching.

We are all different. No-one really knows when they are going to die.

We do not know how long we have in our lives, so it is good to find something to be grateful for, happy and kind each day.

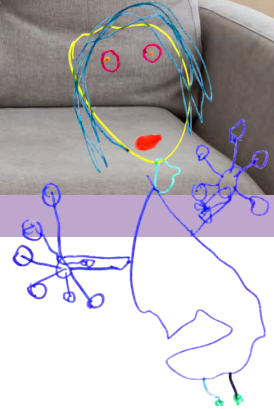
If you are hurting in any way, you should tell always someone you trust.

Mixed emotions including anger

Grownups can have very mixed emotions when someone dies. Just like children.

Everyone can feel like crying, or be angry that the person or animal left us sooner than we would like.

And confusion. We often feel confused.



Questions from children ...

Is there a heaven?

Children have asked me all kinds of questions.

Some people talk about our loved ones and animals going to another dimension called the after life or heaven. Some people do not believe that at all.

You have the choice to decide what you feel.

And finding a way to say goodbye is a good thing.

You might also hear people saying that their pets have gone over the 'rainbow bridge' into a beautiful place where they are healed and happy.

Children will often bring up angels.

If you don't have a belief, you can always say, *'I don't know, but I would like to know - what do **you** think? Tell me more ...'*

Their fears are serious. Take them seriously - speak gently and kindly as you listen without judgement or correction.

It is ok to tell your loved one that you miss them even though they are not here in our reality any more.

Your loved one or loved pet will always be in your heart because of your love with them. You can talk to them when you want and say 'I miss you' and whatever is upsetting you. And then you might be able to say to the loved one, *'it was a good day today. I hope you are happy wherever you are.'*

You might even experience very real feelings that their presence is near you for a moment and then gone again.



Are you going to die?

Children may ask personal questions or share their fears

Children will personalise everything,

"Are you going to die?"

Children's greatest fear is that their loved one or Carer will die and that they will be left alone.

One child even asked me if I would still be alive when they were grown up.

Many children worry - sometimes have a great fear - that their parent or carer or grandparent is going to die next.

You might say something like this ...

"I want to be here a long, long time.

But if I wasn't, there would be someone to take care of you.

You will not be alone."

Honour their feelings. *"I can see you are angry.*

Please do a drawing about how you feel right now. I would really like to see it."

And then let them share it with you

without judgement or correction so you can have a talk together. Be honest if you are grieving also.

It is best not to presume what they have drawn.

Let them share from their heart and you could

be amazed at the simple wisdom of children.





Questions about angels

Children often ask about angels.

Is she an angel now?

Tell the truth as you understand it.

An example could be ... angels are creatures of faith, and while some may believe she is an angel, others may not. What does inside your heart say to you? What feels right for you?

Angels are symbols of hope, love, and compassion. They are spiritual beings that bring comfort and peace to those who believe in them.

Do animals go to heaven?

This is another question that comes up regularly no matter whether the child has any religious background or not?

Children are spiritual beings and they are naturally curious about the spiritual.

A similar answer can be appropriate here, some believe yes, others may not. What does inside your heart say to you? What feels right for you?

Again, ask the child to do a drawing for you and encourage them to tell you what is in the story. This is a safe way to help a child process what is going on inside of them.



Addressing fear and the importance of now

Death is a natural part of life, and even though it hurts so much, one day we will feel a little better.

It's okay to feel scared or worried about death. But it's important to remember that we can focus on living and to make the most of each day.

We can remember our loved ones and pets with love, speak to them through the spirit of the wind carrying our words, and choose to be happy in memory of them.

And to live our best life.

We can say a little mantra, '*Peace begins with me*'.
And, '*I send peace and love to*' (name of loved one).
Thank you.





Ways to process ...



RITUALS and CEREMONY can help individuals with grief and loss. Candles, giving thanks, scattering of ashes, making a memorial or little altar with mementos are all ways a person or child can create ceremony or ritual.

Going to a favourite place on a bush walk or lake, or beach can be a great place to create a little ceremony.

CONTINUING BONDS WITH THE LOVED ONE OR PET

are an opportunity for a person to create meaning using an object to connect with a personal ritual.

Create a picture with images connected to you and your loved one or pet.

This helps to feel a continuing connection to the departed loved one. The symbolic objects and rituals must be meaningful to the person.

CREATING A NEW NARRATIVE

Creating a new self-narrative by using Story or Letter Writing, Journalling, Art Therapy, Movement and much more, or creating an Image Board, Dance or Music, can help the person integrate the loss into their life. Some even turn the experience into inspiration for a musical piece or a movie. Finding a way to process grief is as varied as life is.

Grief is a journey.

There is no one right way, for each person is an individual. There should be no shame in grief.

If you need emergency support please call a 24 hour help line in your area like these in Australia:

LIFELINE 13 11 14

24 hour 7 days Crisis Support www.lifeline.org.au

BEYOND BLUE on 1300 22 46 36

www.beyondblue.org.au

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Karen Curran is professionally qualified in many modalities including Counselling and Creative Therapies, with a special interest in inner healing and changing the effects of grief, loss, trauma and life events. She is also an artist and storyteller.

Photo on front cover and design by Karen Curran
Other Photos various from Canva