

GUIDES
TO THE
FL!PSIDE

A close-up photograph of a young person with dark, curly hair, wearing a white t-shirt and a colorful headband with a butterfly pattern. They are looking down with a somber expression. Another person's shoulder in a green shirt is visible on the right side of the frame. The background is a bright blue sky with light clouds.

**LIVING
WITH GRIEF
AFTER
CANCER**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Canteen acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of this land. We pay respect to Elders past, present and future. We are committed to providing inclusive and appropriate support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, their kin and community.

Indigenous Australians are respectfully advised this resource may contain images, names or stories of people who have passed away.

Ngalaya (Dharawal for ally or friend in battle), is an artwork commissioned by Canteen created by Kamilaroi and Jerrinja woman and artist Jasmine Sarin.



ABOUT THIS BOOK

The death of someone you love can be a devastating and a life-changing experience. This book aims to help you understand how you might feel when a family member dies. Whether it's your parent, sibling or other important person, grief can be messy and confusing. It's common to feel shock, anger, guilt or many other emotions.

Grief will be different for each member of your family, with no right or wrong way. You may not respond in the way you or other people expect.

Grief can affect every part of you and your life – your emotions, thoughts, behaviours, body and relationships. It's not a straightforward experience, it is more of a rollercoaster ride with ups and downs. You might think that grief only lasts a few months, but grief is something that becomes part of you and your life grows around it.

This book is divided into chapters covering various aspects of grief. They will be relevant to you at different times. You can just read the bits that are right for you now, then come back to it another time.

While you may find it hard to believe right now, almost all young people find that life does continue on, but in a different way, after the death of a family member.

This book is not a substitute for talking to your healthcare team (including doctors, nurses, social workers and others). If you are confused or worried about anything, talk to your healthcare team.

We've had a lot of input from other young people who have been through a similar experience, so we hope you find information that helps get your head around grief.

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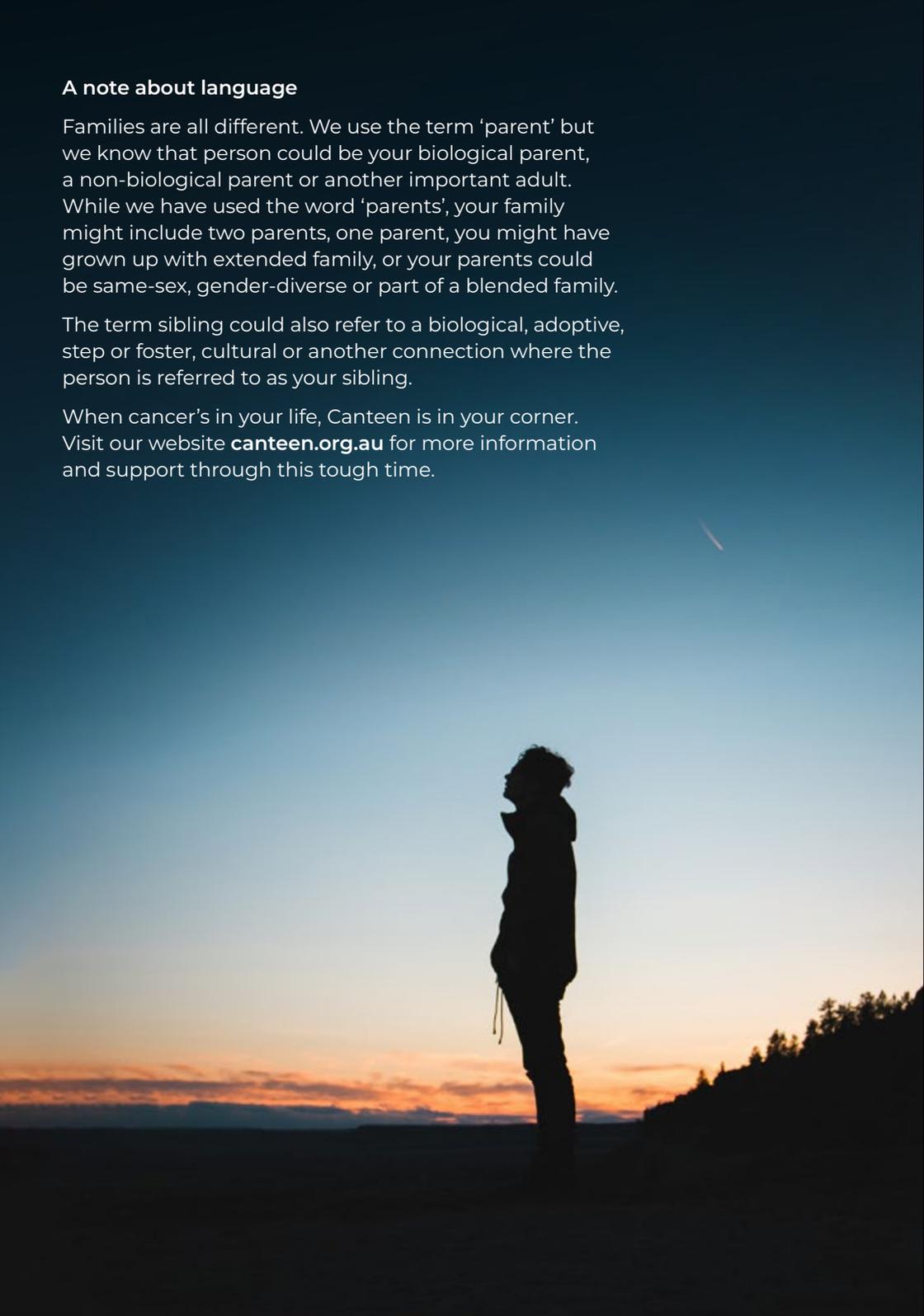
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A note about language

Families are all different. We use the term 'parent' but we know that person could be your biological parent, a non-biological parent or another important adult. While we have used the word 'parents', your family might include two parents, one parent, you might have grown up with extended family, or your parents could be same-sex, gender-diverse or part of a blended family.

The term sibling could also refer to a biological, adoptive, step or foster, cultural or another connection where the person is referred to as your sibling.

When cancer's in your life, Canteen is in your corner. Visit our website canteen.org.au for more information and support through this tough time.



HEAD STUFF

WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is how you respond to loss. It can happen when someone dies, when a friendship changes, your parents separate, you move house or lose a pet. The period after a death is called bereavement and the way you show your grief is called mourning. The way you mourn will likely be different according to your culture, religion or spirituality, family traditions, as well as your typical way of coping.

Perhaps you don't like the word death and prefer to speak about the loss of your parent or sibling in a different way. You might use the words 'lost' or 'passed away' or a different term that is used in your culture.

It doesn't matter what terms you use, the death of a parent or sibling can be devastating and turn your world upside down. You may feel like your life has stopped making sense.



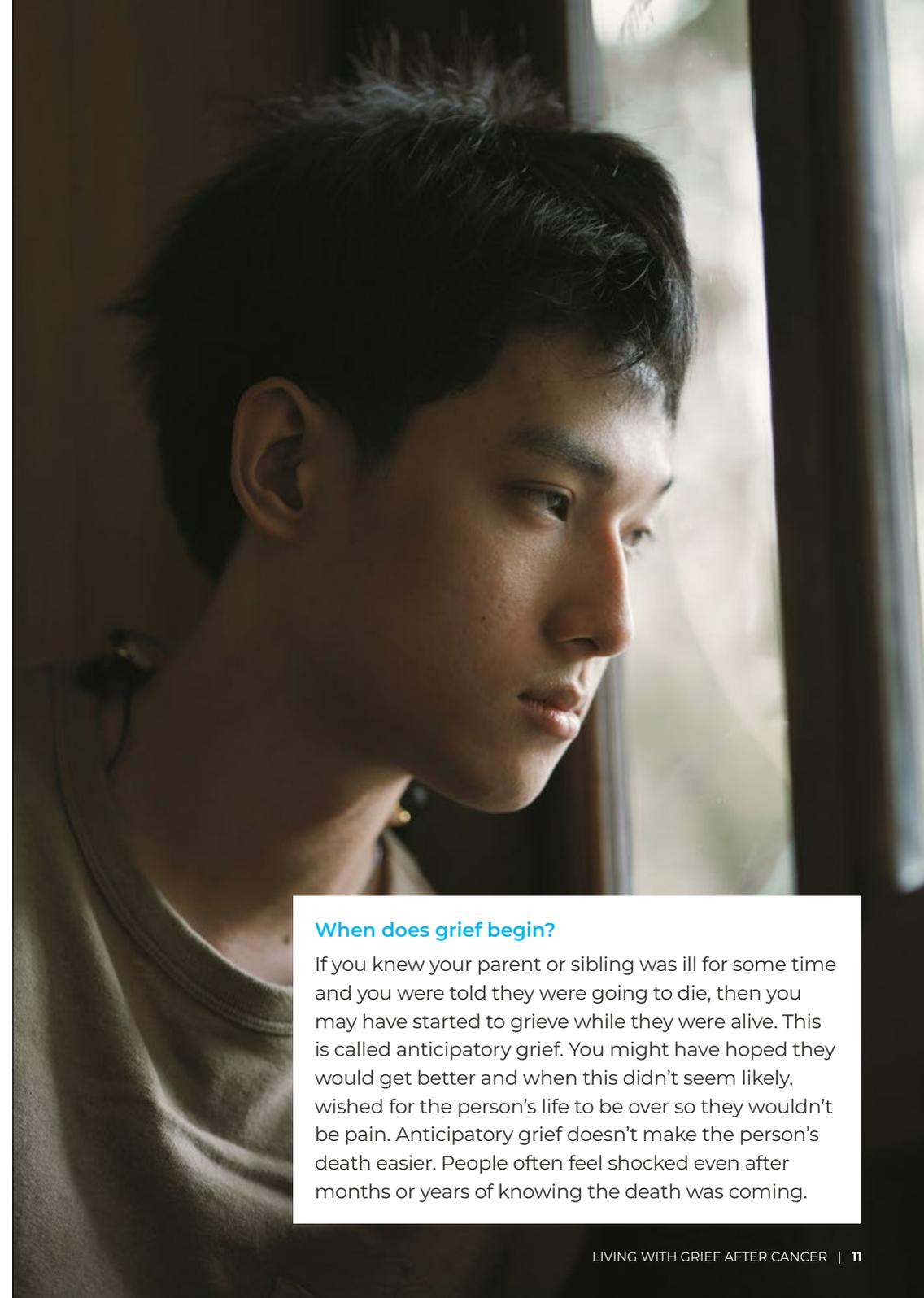
What is grief like?

Grief is different for everyone. It affects many parts of your life including your feelings, thoughts, behaviour, body, beliefs and relationships. Grief doesn't follow stages or a timeline. It's messier than that.

You may feel lots of different emotions and they may change from one moment to the next. They may come in waves or bursts when you're not expecting it.

Below is a table of the feelings, thoughts, behaviours and physical symptoms you may notice.

Feelings	Thoughts	Behaviour	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shock and numbness • Disbelief • Sadness • Anger • Abandoned • Guilt • Regret • Anxiety • Panic • Fear • Scared • Relief • Loneliness • Isolation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worried about others • Thinking the person who has died is still alive • Worried about what life will be like now • Worried who will look after you or other important people and pets • Worried that you could have done something different 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not wanting to see or talk to other people • Avoiding reminders • Restlessness • Crying • Wanting to visit or avoid places important to the person who has died • Keeping belongings • Changes in how much you sleep • Changes in how much you eat • Not motivated to do anything 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being forgetful • Difficulty concentrating • Feeling very tired (exhaustion) • Empty feeling in stomach • Tightness in throat or chest • Dry mouth • Nausea • Heart beating faster ('racing heart') • Feeling breathless • Headaches • Body aches and pains • Getting more colds and infections • Feeling dizzy



When does grief begin?

If you knew your parent or sibling was ill for some time and you were told they were going to die, then you may have started to grieve while they were alive. This is called anticipatory grief. You might have hoped they would get better and when this didn't seem likely, wished for the person's life to be over so they wouldn't be pain. Anticipatory grief doesn't make the person's death easier. People often feel shocked even after months or years of knowing the death was coming.



Does everyone grieve in the same way?

Everyone grieves differently. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Sometimes people find that people and society have their own ideas about grief and can expect people to act and feel the same way. It's important to remember that everyone will respond to grief in a different way.

Grief will vary from person to person for many reasons, including:

- relationship with the person who has died
- how the person died
- what else is happening in your life
- other experiences of loss or death
- ways you usually cope with stress
- amount of support you have
- your cultural, religious or spiritual beliefs about death and dying.

It's common for each family member to respond to the loss of the same person in a different way. Some people may cry and talk about how they feel, others are more private. Some stop doing their usual things, others keep busy. However you respond is okay but because someone is grieving differently to you, it may mean you find it hard to understand or accept each other's response. Try not to judge how anyone is grieving and respect that everyone is different.

The reason people grieve in different ways is because the relationship you

have with a person is unique, and how people grieve is shaped by their upbringing, their culture, their personality, and unique life experiences.

Do you have to cry?

Crying can be a response to strong feelings. It's only one way to release strong emotions. Some people don't cry at all, others can't seem to stop. You might cry if you hear a song or visit a place that reminds you of your parent or sibling who died. You might cry suddenly for no reason, and this can happen months or years after the death. If you don't cry, it doesn't mean that you aren't grieving or that you don't care about the death of your parent or sibling. It's okay to do what feels right for you.

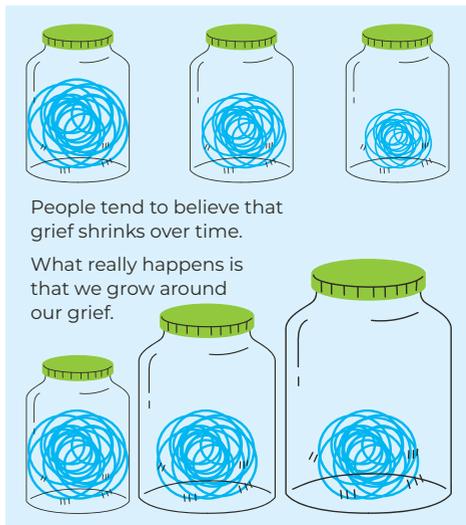
Why do some things make me feel worse?

Some things could make you feel worse. These are known as triggers. For example, hearing a song, smelling their perfume as you walk past someone wearing it, seeing someone who reminds you of your parent or sibling, going near a hospital or watching a news report about someone dying from cancer. Triggers can last for a really long time, and for some people, might not ever really go away. Figuring out the things that trigger your grief and learning to manage them can help. Upcoming birthdays, holidays or anniversaries can also trigger grief – see **page 48**.

How long will grief last?

There is no clear answer to this question. How long grief lasts varies because we all grieve in our own way.

At first, your grief is the only thing you can think about. Gradually your life will begin to include things you enjoy. Your grief won't become smaller, but it will become a part of your life; you may find yourself 'growing around grief'. This doesn't mean you are forgetting your parent or sibling but the grief has become a part of who you are – like in the image right.



Will the grief always feel this intense?

When you are grieving, it's natural for everyday life to seem hard and to have many strong emotions. It's okay if those feelings continue for some time.

For some people, feelings of grief remain strong over time, and they continue to find it hard to manage day to day. If this is happening for you or someone you care about, it is important to get support. It is important to speak with your healthcare professional if you are:

- having thoughts about wanting to end your life, harm someone else or use self-harm
- using alcohol, drugs or non-prescribed medication to cope
- having difficulty accepting the death
- avoiding seeing people
- a sense of disbelief about the death
- strong feelings of bitterness, anger or loneliness
- not eating properly or not having regular showers
- feeling like a part of you has died
- avoiding reminders of the person or surrounding yourself with reminders
- intense feelings of missing or longing that make it hard to think about anything else
- going over how the death could have been avoided, blaming of others and yourself
- feeling that nothing seems important now and life has no meaning or purpose
- wishing that you had died too.

Is grief like depression?

Grief and depression are different but some of the signs are similar. Both can lead to loss of interest in things you normally enjoy, or eating and sleeping too much or too little.

These signs and feelings are a natural response to grief, and may come and go in waves. If you feel sad and empty all the time with no relief, and these feelings make it hard to go about your day, then you might be depressed. Keep in mind that most young people who experience the death of a parent or sibling don't develop depression.

If you think you're having a difficult time managing grief or experiencing depression, a good first step is to talk to your parent and doctor. You could also talk to a psychologist, counsellor or social worker. Canteen has free counselling services that are available face to face, via phone or online. Canteen's online Community, Canteen Connect, is available 24/7 for you to get support from other young people who are going through similar situations to you.

If you have thoughts of suicide, self-harm or wanting to harm someone else, it is important to call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467. In an emergency, you should call Triple Zero (000). For other phone numbers and websites check the '*More information and support*' chapter on **page 63**.

Will life be meaningful again?

Many people want their lives to have purpose and meaning. After the death of your parent or sibling, sometimes you may feel like life doesn't make sense anymore and you may struggle to find purpose and meaning. You may ask yourself difficult questions such as Why did my parent/sibling get cancer? Why did this happen to me and my family? What's the point of life now?

Exploring these questions can be challenging because they seldom have answers. Asking 'why' can be really distressing as an answer cannot be found that will be able to make sense to you. It can be hard to imagine, but for most people, they can and do feel better with time.



HOW YOU MIGHT FEEL

Grief can cause many mixed emotions. Some of these may be similar to the different emotions you felt when your parent or sibling was diagnosed.

The first few days and weeks after the death can be quite intense. You might be surprised that you feel many emotions all at once and that your emotions come and go. You might describe grief as being on an emotional roller-coaster or like you're 'going mad'.

The loss of your parent or sibling may also mean other losses. For example, loss of plans, loss of hope, loss of identity and security. It may also mean changes such as moving house, living with other people, and changing schools. Dealing with these losses and changes may at times feel really hard.

You might feel some or all of the following:

Shocked and numb – Even if you knew your parent or sibling were going to die, you may be in a state of shock. You may feel numb and show no emotion. This reaction can be your brain's way of trying to help protect you while you process the loss and deal with practical things like the funeral. The feeling of numbness usually passes, but how long this takes may vary.

Disbelief – Even though you knew that your parent or sibling was going to die, it still might not feel

real when it actually happens and it may be hard to believe that they are no longer physically here. Some people try to cope by not talking about it.

Sad – This is one of the most common reactions to grief. Some people describe the sadness as a physical pain. This feeling can be so intense that just getting out of bed each day and doing simple tasks feel impossible. You may find it hard to imagine that you will smile or laugh again. Or you may stop looking after yourself (see [page 42](#)) and become depressed.

Lonely – Aside from feeling lonely because you miss the person who has died, you may also feel isolated because friends or other important people don't seem to understand what you're going through. It can be hard when people don't realise that complaining about their family member when someone important to you has died can be really insensitive. When people don't understand grief, sometimes they say things or act in ways that suggest that you should be feeling different or doing better by now. Some people try to cope with this by pretending that they are okay. This can be exhausting, and you might try to protect yourself by avoiding your friends. This withdrawal can make you feel lonely, and like other people just don't get it.

Angry – The death of your parent or sibling can feel unfair. It's common to feel angry and want to blame someone. You may be angry with:

- your parent or sibling for leaving you
- the doctors for not making them better
- yourself or your family members
- the whole world
- religious figures such as God
- other people for not understanding how you feel.

You may then get angry at yourself for feeling this way. Anger is okay and it can help to express your grief in a safe way. See **page 40** for ideas.

Abandoned – You may be angry at your parent or sibling who has died because they have left you and you feel abandoned. If it's a parent who has died, you may feel like you've lost your support system or sense of security. If it's your sibling who has died, you may now have to cope with parents who are sad, and who might find it hard to support you, or they might be having lots of fights.

Frustrated – You may feel like life will never be the same again. Plans you made may need to change or may not happen. It can be hard for some people to think about anything else, and for others they are frustrated because for a longtime life seems to have been about cancer and you want to think about other things.



Anxiety – You may feel anxious about various things when you are grieving. You may worry that something bad will happen to others or yourself and feel anxious about how you'll cope with the loss. Some people get anxious that they might get sick or other people they care about might get sick. You might also worry about things that other people may not think are as big a deal, e.g. Will we still be able to go on holidays? Can I still go out and have fun? Who will teach me to drive? Will I have to change school? Will we move house?

Scared – After the death of a family member, you might be scared about lots of things. You might be scared to be on your own, scared that other people you love will die or scared about what will happen to you and the rest of your family. You might feel scared about what has happened to your family member now they've died. Or you keep thinking about how your parent or sibling looked when they were closer to dying or when they died.

Relieved – If your parent or sibling has been sick for a while, you may feel relieved when they die. You might find this feeling a bit confusing – it doesn't mean that you're glad that they're dead, just that they aren't in pain anymore or they don't have to deal with being so sick. Feeling relieved is normal and lots of people feel this after someone dies particularly after they were unwell for a long time.

Guilty or regretful – When a parent or sibling dies, you may feel guilty about things you said or did, or things you wish you'd said or did. Or maybe you feel guilty for not spending more time with them. It is important to remember that nothing you did, said or thought had anything to do with their death. You might feel guilty if you do something you enjoy and feel happy for a while. If you feel relieved they have died, you might feel guilty. Feeling guilty or feeling regret can be your brain's way of trying to change what happened in the past to be able to make it better now. It can help to practice some self-compassion and say kind things to yourself – remind yourself that you are still a good person even if something happened that you wish didn't before someone died.

Empty – You might feel as though a part of you is missing and their death has left a big hole in your

life. Most people find that their life grows around their grief, and they feel better in time.

Judgement – You may feel that your family and friends are judging how you're grieving or that you're not over your grief, or maybe the choices that your family member made about their cancer treatment, or stopped getting cancer treatment are being questioned. It's important to remember that although lots of people might have an opinion, chances are your family member was doing the best they could with the circumstances they were facing.

Longing – It's common to want to see the person who has died, and you may find yourself talking to them. You might also dream about them or think you feel them. It's okay to do this. Wishing that the person who has died was still alive is common. The feeling of longing can make it hard to concentrate. If you feel that life can't continue without them, it's important you speak to a counsellor or Lifeline on 13 11 14. Speaking with your healthcare professional about these feelings is strongly encouraged. You can also get in touch with Canteen. We offer counselling and an online community for you to connect with young people facing similar challenges. (canteen.org.au).



When a parent dies

The death of a parent when you are a young person can be devastating. You may find it hard to imagine life without your parent as so many things in your world and life can feel like they've changed.

Aside from the feelings described above, the following experiences are common.

Changes in family dynamics –

How you grieve may depend on the relationship you had with your parent. A close relationship may lead to more intense feelings of grief, while a more difficult or distant relationship can mean you feel guilty, regretful, and for some young people where the relationship was particularly tough, relieved. For more information see *Coping with difficult memories* on page 29.

Parents usually have a unique role in a child's life. If you shared interests or lots of private information with your parent, you may feel lonely and lost without them. If your other parent is in your life, the relationship with the parent who is still alive may change. You may need to get to know the other parent better. You may not want the other parent, family members or family friends to try to step into the role of your parent or continue family traditions. If they do, it can be confusing and bring up a whole range of feelings. If your parents were in a relationship when one of them died, it can be a tricky and confusing time if your other parent starts a new relationship.

Tension – The death of a parent may bring siblings closer together and can bring up old rivalries. You might be able to support each other or feel angry with your siblings. Differences in how you're grieving can make any tension harder to get through.



Feeling lost – You may have had a chance to learn some new life skills before your parent died. If you feel you missed the opportunity to learn important life skills before your parent died, you may wonder who will show you now. Whether it's practical skills like cooking, gardening, or budgeting, or more personal skills like navigating relationships or coping with other challenges, you might wonder who will guide you now. Family and friends can be a good source of support and may be keen to step in and help. Sometimes it can help to be clear about what is helpful, like asking a relative to help you learn your parent's favourite recipe to cook.

Changes in roles – If your other parent is struggling with the death of their partner, it can feel like you have

to care for them, provide emotional support, or help with tasks that were usually their responsibility. If you're the eldest sibling, you may also feel expected to care for younger siblings. This swap in caring roles might be overwhelming at a time when you need support. You may also feel like you have to grow up quickly and you miss out on experiences your friends are having because you're prioritising your family's needs over your own. Life priorities can change, and you might find that your expectations for yourself can be unrealistic. With things changing at home, it can be a confusing and tough time. It's important to remember that support is available, and Canteen is in your corner. You can access support from Canteen including free counselling at canteen.org.au.

When a sibling dies

The death of a child or young person in a family can be devastating. You may find it hard to imagine life without your sibling as so many things in your family, life and world have changed.

The death of your sibling may affect you, your family and others in many ways.

You may be dealing with your own grief as well as that of your parents and other siblings and this can make the experience feel harder.

Aside from the feelings described on **page 10**, the following experiences are common.

Overshadowed grief – It's common for others to focus on how your parents are coping, and not so much on how you are doing. For some people it can feel like their grief isn't as important. Some people might say things that aren't helpful like encouraging you to be strong for your parents, or you might worry that telling your parent how you feel might upset them more. For some people, it can feel like a lonely time and that other people don't understand what you're going through.

Changes in family dynamics – Depending on the number of children in your family, you may now be the oldest or youngest or perhaps the only child who is alive. This may mean a change in responsibilities – you may have to take on a different

or bigger role in the family. You might feel you have to care for the younger siblings. Or perhaps you've spent a lot of time visiting hospitals, and without this routine you feel lost.

Unrealistic comparisons – You may feel like you are living in the shadow of your sibling's life and you'll never be as good as them. When people are grieving, it's common for people to focus on the best parts of the person who has died, and gloss over the not-so-great parts. Your parents and other family may focus on the good qualities of your sibling only, and this can feel unfair. This can be really hard and make you feel resentful, or not good enough compared to your sibling who has died.

How your parents feel

Parents expect that their children will grow old, and that parents will die before their children – even when their children are well into adulthood. The death of a child (no matter what age they are) before a parent can feel unbearable.

When your sibling was diagnosed, your parent may have felt that they couldn't show their fear and pain, as they needed to 'stay strong' for them during their treatment. Some parents feel like they have to feel sad all the time because their child died, as it can feel like they are betraying their child if they aren't sad. A parent's grief might take up so much space that it feels that they are unable to support you or your siblings.



Your parents will probably share many of the same feelings as you, but some may be unique to them as the parent.

Guilty – Your parent may feel that they didn't do all they could, or they may question some of the decisions they made about your sibling's treatment. They may feel guilty for not being able to protect their child from cancer. They may be struggling with their own grief and feel guilty about the effect on the family. Your parent might feel guilty that they can't support you the way that you need support, or for the extra responsibilities that they are asking you to take on.

Overprotective – Your parents may suddenly want to know where you are or what you are doing at all times. You may find their concern and fear annoying and overwhelming, especially if you're used to a certain amount of freedom or were just starting to do things on your own. Your parent may now panic about the slightest cold, bruise or ache you

get. Your parent is likely doing these things because they are so scared that something might also happen to you and they are trying to gain a sense of control of the situation.

Detached – Some parents may have the opposite reaction and not seem to be worried what you are up to, and are okay with you figuring out things by yourself. While you might be okay with this at first, after a while you may want them to take an interest in your life.

Lonely – Your parents may feel that no-one understands what they're going through. They may find spending time with friends with a child of the same age as your sibling difficult, and they might avoid some people or places. It can be a lonely time for parents, even if they have a partner, friends or family seeming to offer lots of support.

These strong feelings can affect the way your parents behave. Your relationship with your parents might change for a while and home life can feel unpredictable.

Common challenges

Whether it is your parent or sibling that has died, you may experience some common challenges.

Outlook – Some young people say that the death of their parent or sibling changes their priorities and outlook on life. Some people believe that the death of a parent or sibling gives you a new or different view on the world and makes you a stronger person.

This isn't true for everyone. While you may find a sense of different purpose, placing unrealistic expectations on yourself can be really hard to manage. It is important to be kind to yourself.

Unrealistic expectations – Some young people feel like they need to do something 'special' with their life after the death of a parent or sibling. This might be to fulfil the goals their parent had for them or to make up for the opportunities their sibling didn't get. This can be a lot of pressure. And if you want to do something different to what was hoped for, this can cause conflict. It's important to do what is right for you and not what is expected of you.

Missed opportunities – Grief can show up regardless of what your relationship with your parent or sibling looked like. You may feel guilt about things you said or did, or missed the chance to say 'I love you', 'I'm sorry', or 'I forgive you'.

You might feel angry or resentful that your parent or sibling did not try to mend a difficult relationship with you before they died.

These feelings may be more intense if you didn't get the chance to talk openly with them or spend much quality time with them before they died.

Some people can feel guilt because they will have opportunities that their family member can't have now they've died. This can bring up challenging feelings like regret and sadness.

For some tips on how to talk about what is happening, see *Talking about grief* on **page 30**.

Increased responsibilities – The death of your parent or sibling will probably mean responsibilities within the family change, and you may have to do more. This could include paying bills, grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning. You might feel angry about the extra responsibilities and frustrated if you feel others aren't doing as much. You might feel like you have to grow up quickly and act like an adult.

Seeing family life change may be a reminder that your parent or sibling had died. It will take time for the family to adjust to the new situation. While everyone is probably trying to do their best, things at home will be different.

It can be tough to adjust to more change, and it's okay to be finding it difficult to adjust. Most people like routine and for life to stay the same, especially when changes feel out of control and life is not how you want it to be. Try to remember that like you, most people will be doing the best they can.

Coping with difficult memories – Most people are likely to have good and bad memories of growing up. If you had a complicated relationship with your parent or sibling, your response to their death might be complicated too.

It's common to feel grief even if you had a difficult relationship. Some people feel a deeper grief than they expected and may find that others think they shouldn't be so sad or downplay how they feel. If you feel like you shouldn't be grieving the way you are, it can make it harder to talk about how you're feeling.

Another common response is to feel a sense of relief but then to feel bad for this reaction.

There may be other family members that have fond memories of your parent or sibling. This can be difficult and make you feel isolated, confused, or that the other family members didn't know them like you did.

It's important to accept that everyone had a unique relationship with your parent or sibling and will grieve differently. If you can't speak honestly to others about how you feel, it may be better to express your emotions in other ways. You could write a letter, poem or song, or make some art about your parent or sibling describing how you feel about them. Afterwards you can keep it or destroy it – the purpose is to give you an opportunity to try to make some sense of your feelings.

If the death of your parent or sibling brings up painful memories, you may need support to help you cope. Contact Canteen (**canteen.org.au/counselling**) for information about free counselling services. You can also contact Kids Helpline (**kidshelpline.com.au**, 1800 55 1800) or Lifeline (**lifeline.org.au**, 13 11 14).



TALKING ABOUT GRIEF

Grief can be hard to talk about. Most young people don't have much experience dealing with death let alone talking about it, especially if you come from a culture that doesn't often talk about death and dying. Finding ways to talk about grief is a healthy part of the process, and it's common for people to find this challenging.

You may worry that if you talk about the person who has died then you will upset people or make them uncomfortable, or worry that you might get upset in front of people. This can make honest communicating challenging.

It's important to remember that not sharing how you're feeling will probably make you feel worse.

Try to talk about how you're feeling. You might find that the more you talk about grief, the easier it gets and the more comfortable others become with the subject. Sometimes you might not feel like talking, and that's okay. You can express your emotions in other ways – see **page 32** for ideas.

It can be helpful to remember the legacy of the person who's passed away, especially the values that are cherished by those who care about the person who has passed away.

These values are often attached to different memories, skills and experiences. It can help to see the skills and values of the person who passed continue on through other people and making a difference in people's lives. Remembering and honouring these memories, skills and values of the person who has died can support emotions to be present and sometimes can change the emotions around loss towards emotions of happiness and laughter.

Different reactions

Each family member may grieve differently. Sometimes the reaction of your family member may surprise or shock you.

Families may find talking about grief complicated because each family member will grieve in their own way and at different times. This can lead to misunderstandings or conflict. For example, if you can't stop crying and they seem unaffected, you might think they 'don't care'. Or if you want to talk or share memories but others find it too painful, this can be difficult.

It's important for family members to recognise and respect how each person is grieving. Be patient and understanding as you support each other through the ups and downs of grief.

When others stop talking about the person who died

While it can be difficult to talk about grief, it can also be painful when family and friends stop speaking about the person who has died. Many people want to keep remembering and sharing stories. If you feel this way, let your family and friends know that you want to talk about the person who died. This takes courage but may be helpful to others who want to help but are worried about upsetting you by bringing up memories.



Tips for talking about grief

- Find someone you trust to talk to – a friend, family member, counsellor or online community. You can visit Canteen's online community, Canteen Connect, 24/7 to get support from other young people who are going through similar situations to you. Visit canteenconnect.org.
- Expect that it will be hard and uncomfortable at first and there may be lots of awkward silences. That's normal when you're talking about something difficult.
- Think about what you want to say before you start. You could even write it down and then read it out.
- Don't worry if you, your parent or your sibling gets upset or cries. That's okay – talking about the death of a family member can be emotional.
- Do something at the same time as talking, e.g. go for a walk, clean up in the kitchen, pull up weeds in the garden. This can sometimes make it easier because it takes the pressure off the conversation.
- Try not to worry too much about saying the wrong thing – nobody expects you to express yourself perfectly. It may take time to work out the best way to talk to each other.

When talking is too hard

Sometimes talking about grief feels too hard. Maybe you don't know what to say or worry about getting upset. If you want your parent or siblings to know how you're feeling, you can find ways to communicate without the pressure of face-to-face conversations. These suggestions may help:

- send a text message, email or letter
- find quotes or cards that say what you may be feeling
- share songs that say it for you
- create drawings, paintings or other artwork that reflect your emotions
- write or play music
- do something together that makes you feel connected, e.g. go for a walk, cook dinner.

If you or your family feel you can't talk about the death of your parent or sibling, it may help to speak to a counsellor or social worker. They can give you ideas on how to communicate with each other. You can also contact Canteen (canteen.org.au/counselling) for information about free counselling services.

Telling other people

It may be hard to tell other people about your parent or sibling's death. While family and many friends will know that your family member has died, there may be others who don't know and you have to tell them what's happened.

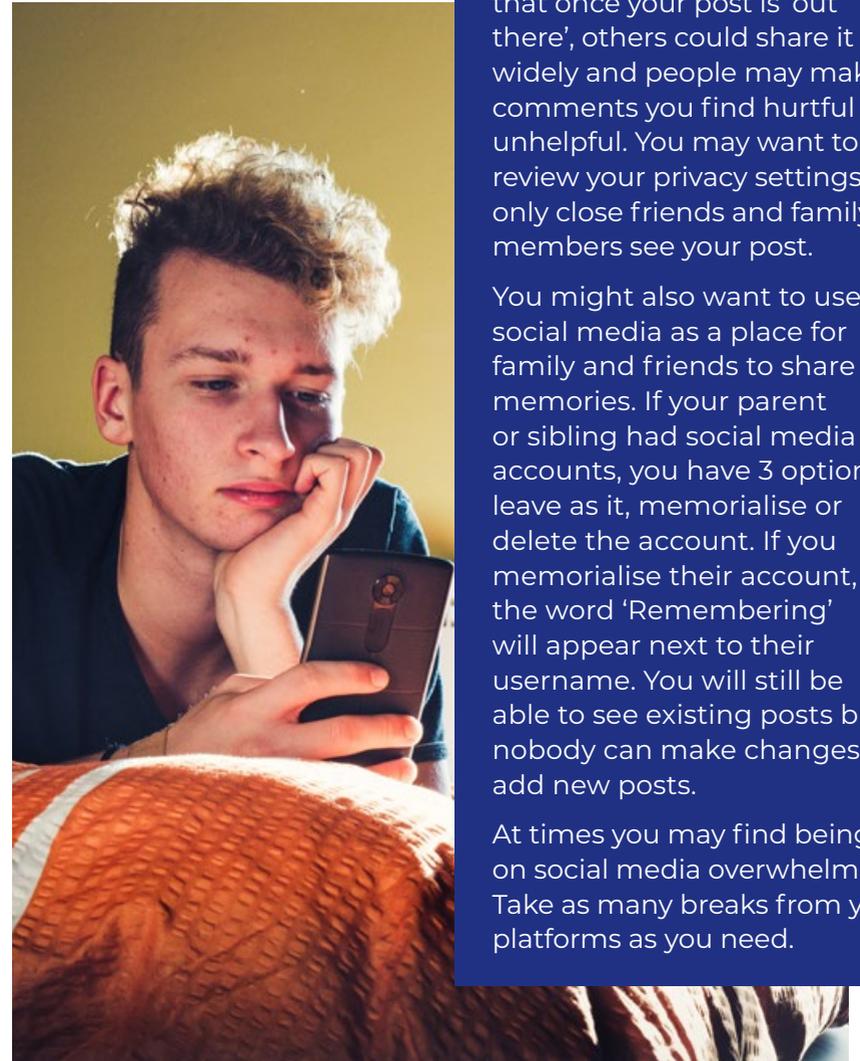
When someone doesn't know that your family member has died, they might ask how they are and then you need to share with them that they have died. This can feel upsetting and awkward for both of you.

Sharing the news that someone has died may be really tough, and you may worry that you'll become upset and cry. The person who you are sharing the news with will probably not know what to say and may react with shock and disbelief. These suggestions may make telling others about the death easier.

- What you tell people is up to you. You get to decide how much information you feel comfortable sharing. It may be different depending on who the person is.
- Make a list of people you most need to tell. Consider asking a family member or friend to tell some of these people.
- Think about what you want to say. You can start the conversation by saying something like, 'I have some sad news to share with you' or 'I wanted to let you know about something that happened recently. On [day], my [sibling / parent / grandma] died'. Avoid using euphemisms like passed away which may confuse people.
- Practise saying the words out loud.
- Use text, email or even a letter to let people know. These may help you manage your reaction and the reaction of others.

- Prepare answers to common questions. See Answering questions on [page 36](#) for more tips.

After these conversations you may feel overwhelmed and upset. Reach out to your family, friends or a counsellor if you need support.



Sharing on social media

You might want to use social media to let people know your parent or sibling has died. This can be a fast way to tell lots of people and means you don't have to say the same thing over and over. Keep in mind that once your post is 'out there', others could share it widely and people may make comments you find hurtful or unhelpful. You may want to review your privacy settings so only close friends and family members see your post.

You might also want to use social media as a place for family and friends to share memories. If your parent or sibling had social media accounts, you have 3 options: leave as it, memorialise or delete the account. If you memorialise their account, the word 'Remembering' will appear next to their username. You will still be able to see existing posts but nobody can make changes or add new posts.

At times you may find being on social media overwhelming. Take as many breaks from your platforms as you need.

Other people's reactions

Unhelpful advice

It's common to get unhelpful advice when you're grieving as people may struggle to find the right words to offer comfort and support. People usually say these things with good intentions, but it can feel upsetting because the advice is not usually helpful.

You may have heard some of these comments:

- 'They're in a better place now. They don't have to suffer anymore.'
- 'Everything happens for a reason.'
- 'If you look around, there's always someone worse off.'
- 'Keep your chin up.'
- 'God never gives you more than you can handle' or 'God only takes the special ones.'
- 'At least you had them for (insert the appropriate number) years.'
- 'I know just how you feel.'
- 'You should be strong for your family.'

While people may mean well, it's okay to let them know that you find their comments hurtful. You might find it helpful to think about ways to respond. Try to spend time with family and friends who understand or other young people who are going through a similar situation to you. Visit canteenconnect.org.

Dealing with pressure from others to 'move on'

Some people may put pressure on you to get on with your life. How we think about grief has changed. In the past, people talked about 'getting over' the death of someone and used terms like 'moving on' or 'putting it behind you'. People who suggest you 'get over' grief and 'move on' often want you to feel better but may not know how to help. This is because grief is often misunderstood.

If you can, tell them you need space and time to adjust. Remember, that grief doesn't have a timeline and there's no need to rush through how you feel because others think you should.

People stop using the name of the person who has died

While it can be difficult to talk about death, it can be also painful when family and friends stop using the name of your parent or sibling or speaking about them. It can be helpful to say to your important people that you'd like to talk about your memories of the person, share stories or look at photos together. This can let people know that it's okay to bring up the person who's died or to share memories.

In many cultures, it's okay to ask about the most appropriate way to talk about someone who's died if you're not sure. If supporting someone from another culture, try to learn about the culture first and seek to understand.

If you want to talk about the person and share stories, use their name (or cultural name) in conversation and ask if that is okay. If you're grieving, you can also gently remind family and friends that you like hearing the name or memories of your parent or sibling. This takes courage but let's others know what you're comfortable with. Sometimes people might have been avoiding using the name of the person who's passed away or sharing memories because they're worried it will upset you.

In some cultures, the name of the person who's died is not used for a period of time (and sometimes their names is not used again), but families can find other ways to talk about the person besides using their name, such as using the person's cultural name. It can be helpful to talk about what feels most comfortable for you, your family, and your culture. Sometimes culture is a significant reason why a person's name is not used after they have passed away. In some cultures, talking

about death directly can be seen as disrespectful, and also can have spiritual consequences for the family. If you're supporting someone from another culture, try to follow the lead of people in the cultural group.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prefer not to talk about death at all with people who are not family, and asking questions might be accidentally offensive. Families may choose to use communication about the person who's passed through body language, coded language and / or tone of voice. It important to be culturally respectful and follow the lead of the Elders and family, to understand the culture and how to be supportive and respectful. Many elders will teach and give advice about cultural protocols for that area on how to raise the subject around someone who has passed. Elders may also be able to help connect people to culture and understand cultural ways of grieving.





Answering questions

‘How are you?’ – People ask this question all the time, often as a casual greeting, without expecting a real answer. After someone has died, it can be hard to know what to say – you might not want to answer with the truth, which might be feelings such as awful, lost or afraid. Depending on who is asking and how close you are, you can say ‘Okay, thanks for asking’, ‘Today is a hard day’ or ‘Hanging in there – what about you?’.

Casual questions – There will be times in the future when you will be asked about your family. You might feel awkward answering simple questions like what do your parents do or how many siblings do you have. Often the hard part is dealing with people’s reaction to the news of the death.

How you reply may depend on the situation and how you feel on the day. It might help if you prepare a couple of different replies beforehand – for example, ‘My mum was a doctor’ or ‘I have two siblings, but one died’. If you choose not to talk about your parent or sibling, this doesn’t mean you’ve forgotten them or don’t care about them. It’s okay to have a different answer depending on the situation. See also *Unhelpful advice* on **page 34**.

RELATIONSHIPS AND GRIEF

Grief can affect your relationships with family and friends. It’s natural for these relationships to change as you get older, and the death of a family member may change it even more.

Immediate family

Sharing the experience of grief can sometimes bring family members closer together. On the other hand, the stress of grief may lead to tension or conflict, and some family members may become more distant. Differences in how each family member is grieving can also cause tension.

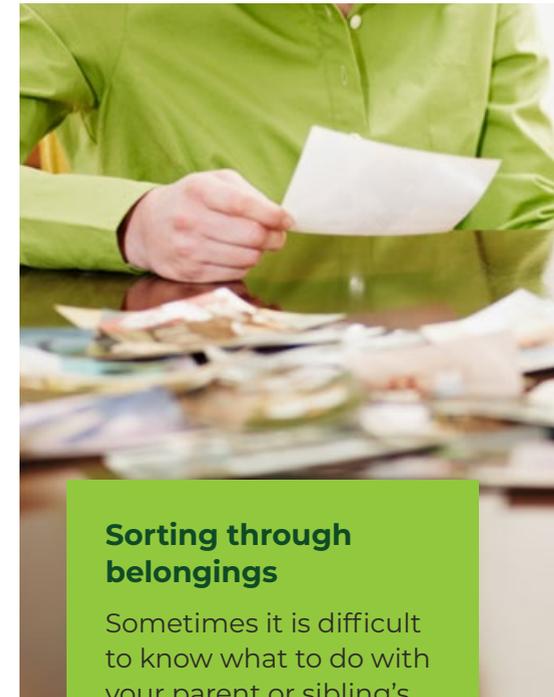
You might feel sad about all the times and special events that your family member will miss. Preparing for these occasions can make it a little easier. See tips on handling birthdays, celebrations and other special dates on **page 48**.

If you were not close to your parent or sibling or your relationship was complicated, you may think you’ll grieve less or cope better. You may be surprised that you might still feel sad, angry and guilty. There are many reasons for this response. See *Coping with difficult memories* on **page 29** for more information.

When the relationship was close, you can feel lost without the person who

has died. You may have to learn new skills to manage the distress.

If you’re trying to cope with these thoughts and feelings, it’s a good idea to talk to someone. Contact Canteen counselling at **canteen.org.au/counselling** and see *More information and support* on **page 63** for ideas on who might be helpful.



Sorting through belongings

Sometimes it is difficult to know what to do with your parent or sibling’s belongings, e.g. clothes, books, and any other things they valued. Try not to rush into making decisions. Later, you may have more ideas about what you would like to do with these things.

Blended families

In blended families, the death of a family member can further complicate relationships and dynamics. How you feel about the death of a step-parent or your parent's partner may depend on your relationship with them. If you have step-siblings and they have lost their parent, their grief will probably be more intense than yours. Be patient and understanding as your step-sibling and parent deal with their grief.

New relationships and families

After the death of a parent (including step-parents), your other parent might start – or want to start – dating. Your parent dating is a reminder that your other parent has died and that life has changed.

While you may understand why your parent wants to find love or companionship, you may have your own ideas on how long your parent should wait before starting a new relationship. It's important to communicate openly and honestly with your parent about your feelings regarding their decision to start dating. Let them know how you feel or if you need more time to adjust to the idea. It's common to feel angry or jealous. You may think you should be loyal to your parent who has died and not accept a new partner. Try to remember their decision to start dating doesn't diminish their love for you or their love for the parent that

has died, and it's likely they are trying to invest in their life and happiness.

Talking to your parent about how you're feeling about them dating can help you come up with ideas about how to navigate this new phase of life. Your parent might decide to date even if you say you're uncomfortable with the idea.

Even if you are okay with your parent finding a new partner, you may feel protective of them and want to know lots about the person they are dating. Talking to your parent about how you are feeling and what might help you understand the circumstances is a good start.

If your parent has more children with a new partner, it can be tough to adjust. You might feel jealous or worried about being replaced. It will take time to figure out your place in the new family.

Like so many other things, it will take patience and understanding to adapt to the changes.

Friends and/or partner

If your parent or sibling had been sick for a while, you will already know that some friends provide great support, others may find the situation overwhelming.

Some things to keep in mind include:

They don't know what to say – Your friends or partner may be scared of saying the wrong thing. So they may say nothing. If you want to talk, you may have to start the conversation or let them know that it's okay to talk

about your parent or sibling. They may be scared to use the name of your parent or sibling because they're worried you'll get upset. Canteen has a range of resources that can help – check out canteen.org.au/friends.

They won't say things to deliberately upset you – If your friends or partner say stuff that really annoys you and makes you angry, try not to be offended. Keep in mind that they're probably not trying to upset you on purpose; it's just that they don't understand.

They have their own lives – Your friends or partner may talk about what's happening at school or uni/ TAFE or work and this may make

you feel left out, or angry because it feels that stuff is not important in comparison. It might feel hard, but they haven't had the same experience as you.

They may change – Your partner and some friends may not understand what you're going through, and this can change how close you feel or how much you have contact with each. This can feel really upsetting and lonely, as you might feel you need your important people around you. Connecting with other young people who get it can help.

Visit canteenconnect.org to connect with other young people who are having a similar experience.



LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

This chapter will explore ways to help you look after yourself. Grief can be exhausting emotionally and physically. It's important to find ways to take care of yourself and to develop healthy strategies throughout the grief process. Sometimes when people are going through tough times, they may deliberately hurt themselves or turn to alcohol or other drugs to try to get relief from the pain. Even though this might seem helpful at the time, this short-term 'fix' may cause more problems later, including having a negative impact on your health and relationships.

Safe ways to deal with grief

It's normal to feel sadness and grief after you experience loss. Grief often hurts and can cause strong feelings that can make you feel out of control. Finding healthy ways to navigate these feelings can help.

- Look after yourself – Eat several small meals a day, get enough sleep, try to keep doing your regular sport or exercise routine, drink plenty of water.
- Exercise – A walk, swim, yoga or bike ride a few times a week can reduce stress and help you feel better.
- Find ways to laugh or cry – Look for ways to have fun and be silly. Have a laugh with friends or watch a sad movie.

- Find a private space and scream very loudly.
- Punch a pillow – Use your hands, a stick or anything else you can get your hands on.
- Express how you feel – e.g. write it down, try journaling or start an online blog.
- Keep doing activities you enjoy – Hang out with friends, play sport, listen to music, watch a show, or play video games. Doing things you enjoy can help manage stress.
- Use simple relaxation strategies – Play with a pet, squeeze a stress ball, have a warm shower or bath or herbal drink before bed.
- Learn how to meditate – This is all about being in the moment and can help you manage stress. There are several apps that can help you get started with mindfulness, including Headspace ([headspace.com](https://www.headspace.com)) and Smiling Mind ([smilingmind.com.au](https://www.smilingmind.com.au)).
- Get outside every day – A short walk or a few minutes sitting in the park or your garden can help.
- Express your spirituality – Some people find comfort in their faith or other types of spirituality. See [page 50](#).
- Support each other – Talk to your family and friends about what you miss most about your parent or sibling and share memories.
- Join in rituals – These can help you process your loss or find meaning in it. See [page 48](#) for ideas.



- Preserve memories – Talking about your parent or sibling can help you cope. See [page 46](#) for ideas.
- Prepare for triggers – Anniversaries, birthdays and other celebrations or holidays can bring up strong emotions as can some places, songs, photos. Have a plan on how to manage these days and moments. See [page 48](#).
- Ask friends or family for help if you're finding it hard to manage or need help looking after pets.
- Beware of unhealthy coping strategies such as using alcohol and drugs, which can make things feel worse in the long run. See [page 43](#).
- Join an online community – Connect with other people in a similar situation. They'll likely understand what you're going through and can share tips, support and information. You might want to check out Canteen Connect ([canteenconnect.org](https://www.canteenconnect.org)).

Unhelpful ways to deal with grief

Sometimes when everything feels out of control, people can look for ways that they can control their situation. While young people are figuring out who they are and what they want their life to be like, it's common for them to try out new things and to take risks. During grief, a person's brain can be pretty overwhelmed, and this can impact on healthy decision-making, or can increase risk taking behaviour. When someone is struggling, healthy coping strategies can feel like they aren't enough, and

some people will turn to unhealthy strategies like using alcohol and drugs, or using self-harm to try to manage the distress. This can become unsafe and unhealthy and lead to other problems, so it's important to seek help if this is happening for you or someone you care about.

Find someone you trust to share what is happening like your parent, your GP, counsellor or get in touch with Canteen Connect visit canteenconnect.org.

Drugs and alcohol

You may be curious or have experimented with drugs, drinking alcohol, smoking and vaping. While you may think using drugs or drinking alcohol will help you manage stress or reduce painful feelings, the effects are temporary, and can actually make you feel worse. Try to avoid using these to make you feel better, and re-visit the list of healthy coping strategies to help you cope.

If you are using drugs and alcohol to cope with grief, you can ask for help quitting. For information and support, call the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on 1800 250 015.

Angry outbursts

Feeling angry when your sibling or parent has died is common. Anger sometimes covers up other emotions like fear, stress or hurt. See **page 20** for reasons you might feel angry. If you don't think you have a safe place to express yourself, you may turn your anger on yourself or others through getting into fights, getting into trouble with authorities, or having road rage if you drive. This is a sign that it might help to express your anger and other feelings in healthy ways. Using violence or getting into trouble does not help, and violence is not okay. There are ways to express your anger in ways that don't involve hurting yourself or others.

See *Safe ways to deal with grief* on **page 40**.

Risk-taking behaviours

Adolescence and young adulthood are a time where young people often are figuring out who they are, who they are attracted to (if anyone), and what they want to do with their life. It's common for young people during this period of life to take risks such as dangerous driving, drug use, binge drinking, unprotected sex, extreme sports/activities, gambling, and sexting.

After the death of a parent or sibling, you might take more risks as a way to feel something besides grief, and some people say taking risks makes them feel alive and strong. Taking risks can also be an attempt to regain a sense of control over your life. Sometimes risk-taking behaviours can lead to problems with your health, relationships, education, work or the law. Trying out a new skill or doing physical activity such as a sport, yoga or bush walking can help reduce stress and improve mood, and are a healthy way to cope with emotions. See *Safe ways to deal with grief* on **page 40** for more suggestions.

Self-harm

This is when you hurt yourself on purpose to try to manage emotional or psychological pain. Using self-harm is an unhealthy, temporary coping strategy that is sometimes used when people are overwhelmed and don't know how to cope with their feelings. If you are using self-harm, first aid and medical treatment should be sought to care for your body. If you or someone you care about is using self-harm, it's important to seek support from a GP or counsellor. For information and support, visit au.reachout.com/mental-health-issues/self-harm

Having other strategies when feeling overwhelmed and thinking about using self-harm can help, such as:

- phone a support service like Kids Help Line or Lifeline (24 hours)
- hold ice cubes in your hand or mouth
- splash cold water on your face or have a cold shower
- use a red pen to draw on the area you would like to self-harm
- wear one or more rubber bands on your wrist and snap them when you feel the need
- eat something that's hot, e.g. chilli, wasabi
- put warm candle wax on yourself and then peel it off
- go for a walk, run or do some type of high-intensity exercise

- watch a sad movie and have a good cry
- find a private space and scream very loudly.

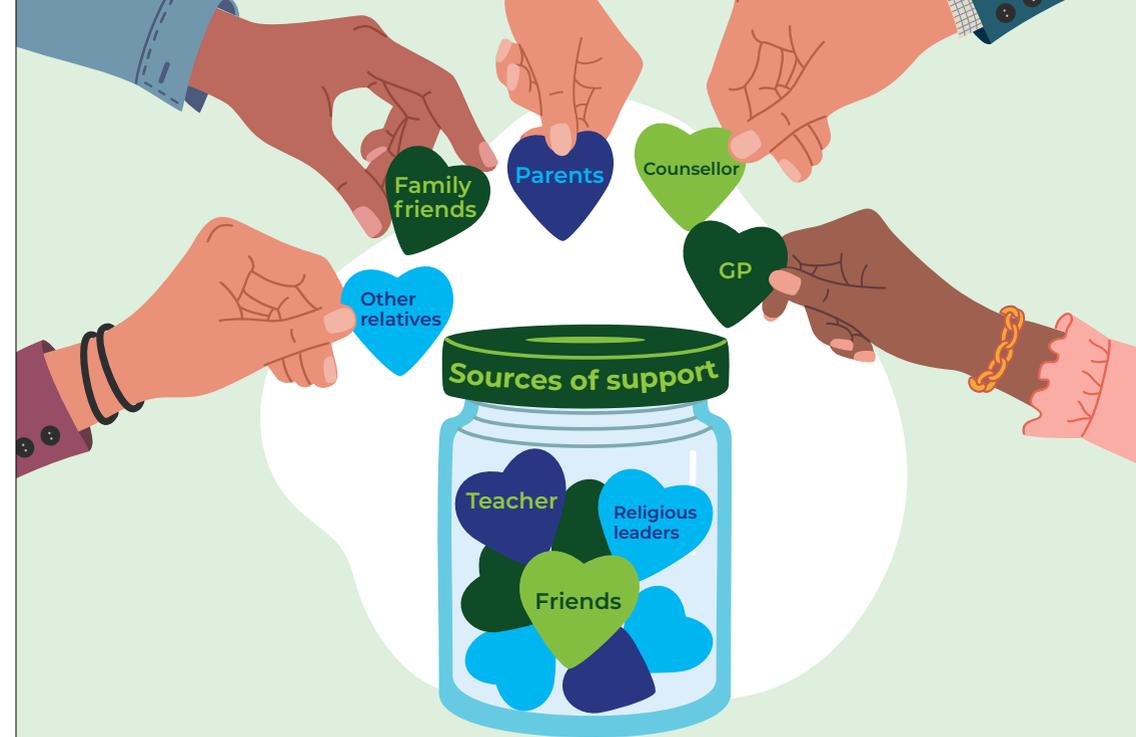
For tips, visit beyondblue.org.au or download the Calm Harm app. You can talk to someone you trust about what's happening or call Lifeline on 13 11 14. It's important to seek first aid or medical treatment if you have an injury. If you have used self-harm and have injuries that need immediate medical attention, call Triple Zero (000).

Suicidal thoughts

Sometimes it's hard to imagine life without your parent or sibling and this may lead to thoughts of suicide. This is not uncommon for people who are grieving. It's important to remember that life can feel better, and support is available. For information and support options, you can visit kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/im-thinking-about-suicide

If you are thinking about taking your own life, it's important to tell someone like a parent, GP, or counsellor to help you stay safe. You can also call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800.

If you are feeling unsafe now, call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467, or go to your nearest emergency department at hospital. In an emergency, call Triple Zero (000).



Getting support

Getting the right sort of support when you are grieving is important. Grief is ongoing and the kind of support you need may change.

It's important to find people who will:

- listen to you
- not judge you
- be there when you need them
- keep things private (if you ask)
- be honest with you
- have a sense of humour
- not tell you that they know how you feel.

Where you get support from now that your parent or sibling has died may be different than when they were living with cancer. Everyone in your family may be grieving and

they may not be able to give you the support that you need.

The type of support you need may vary. It may include:

- allowing you to talk openly and honestly about what is going on
- helping you keep up with study
- going with you to their place of rest or a place that holds special memories
- staying in touch
- remembering anniversaries, birthdays or other special events
- not being scared to mention the name of the person who has died
- respecting that you need to deal with your grief in your own way
- offering to be part of any rituals that you may want to hold.

Support organisations

Depending on what you need, support is available, which can make a difference. Canteen, the organisation for young people living with cancer, offers support. There are also other organisations that work with young people facing a similar experience to you.

Cancer Hub – an initiative by Canteen, Camp Quality and Redkite – is a one-stop-shop to help you access all the different practical and emotional support you and your family need, regardless of which organisation is providing the service. Visit cancerhub.org.au or call 1800 945 215.

Online support

There are lots of online communities for young people impacted by grief, such as Canteen Connect, which is available 24/7 at canteenconnect.org.

Joining an online community is a good way to connect with people. It means you can chat to people but don't need to meet face to face. Some people prefer to remain anonymous and simply read other people's stories, which makes them feel like they're not alone in what they are feeling and experiencing.

How Canteen can support you

Getting the right information, advice and support can really help. Canteen is in your corner. We can put you in touch with a counsellor and connect

you with other young people who also have a family member who have died from cancer.

Find out more about canteen.org.au/grief.

Maintaining a connection

After the death of a family member, many people worry that they'll forget how they look, sound or smell or other details about them. It's natural to want to continue to feel connected to your parent or sibling in some way. Feeling connected through a ritual or remembering can be a source of comfort.

These connections can be one-off, or something you do every day, month or year or on certain dates or events. They can be public or private, involve the family and friends or done on your own. They can be big or small, and they can also change. This is a personal experience so it's okay to do whatever helps you feel they are a part of your life.

Ways to remember

- Talk to them out loud or in your head.
- Share stories and memories with others, and use the name of your parent or sibling.
- Write letters to them - you could focus on what you want to thank them for, what you regret or provide them with updates on your life.
- Listen to their favourite music,

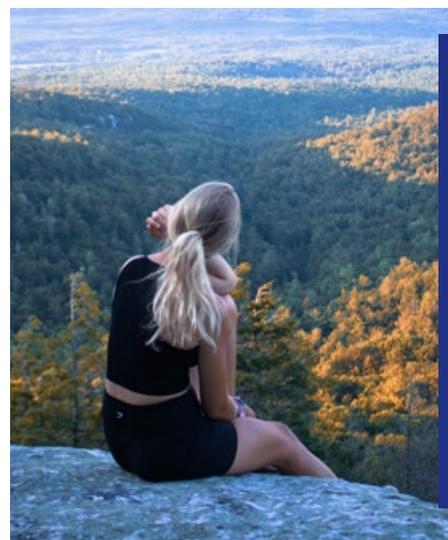
watch their favourite movies or cook their favourite food.

- Display photos or make an online album.
- Visit a favourite place or their final resting place.
- Create rituals that maintain a connection – see [page 48](#).
- Fill a box with things that belonged to them or remind you of them, e.g. photos, cards, pieces of clothing, toys.
- Put together photos, stories, quotes in a scrapbook.
- Write down memories and stories you collect from others.
- Download voice messages on your mobile phone or even keep their mobile phone so that you can listen to their voice.
- Wear their clothes, accessories, perfume or aftershave.

- Make a quilt, cushion or some other item from their clothes.
- Cook their favourite recipes – just smelling the dish can bring you straight back to memories of your family's kitchen.
- Donate to their favourite cause or fundraise to support research for the disease they were diagnosed with.
- Volunteer for an organisation important to your parent or sibling.

For some of you, the relationship you had with the parent or sibling who has died was a difficult one. It may have been one of conflict, anger and hurt.

This may mean your memories can be difficult rather than comforting. Get in touch with Canteen or another support service. Canteen offers counselling and an online community for you to connect with other young people facing a similar experience to you (canteen.org.au).



How you cope with grief may be different from your family and friends

They may not want to take part in rituals or activities or they don't want to talk about the person who has died. Try not to let what others say stop you from doing things that will help you maintain a connection with your parent or sibling.

Birthdays, celebrations and other special dates

One of the hardest things about the death of a parent or sibling is that they won't be part of future birthdays, holidays, celebrations and other important events in your life in the same way.

These occasions can be tough after someone has died as they are a reminder of their absence, and grief can feel more intense. Some people say that the lead up to the date is often worse than the actual day.

It can help to plan what you would like to do. Often the 'firsts' of these occasions are the hardest – because you can't imagine how you'll be able to celebrate without your parent or sibling or how you'll feel on the day. Some people say that the second year feels as hard.

It may take a while to find a way you're comfortable with and it's okay to keep some traditions and rituals, change them or stop doing them. Over time you may create new traditions that help make your parent or sibling a part of the occasion.

You may have already learnt that life for your friends continues on as normal for them, and that they are not aware of your grief. Friends may not remember days that have special importance for you. It can help to post about the occasion on social media or let friends know you need some support during these times.

When you're not included in the planning

If your family don't include you in the planning of birthdays, anniversaries, other holidays or celebrations, and you want to be, let them know that you'd like to be involved.

If you feel like you can't talk to your family directly, consider telling someone else and they can share details of how you'd like to acknowledge these events with your family. Alternatively, you might like to organise your own ritual to remember your family member. Canteen Connect can help you get in touch with people in a similar situation. See *Getting support* on **page 45** for people who may be able to help out.

Rituals

Carrying out rituals is a way to remember the person who died or mark anniversaries or special occasions. If you practice a formal religion, there are often specific rituals around death, funerals, and anniversaries. You can also create your own rituals to mark special events and anniversaries. Everyone grieves differently so it's okay to celebrate in a way that is meaningful to you.

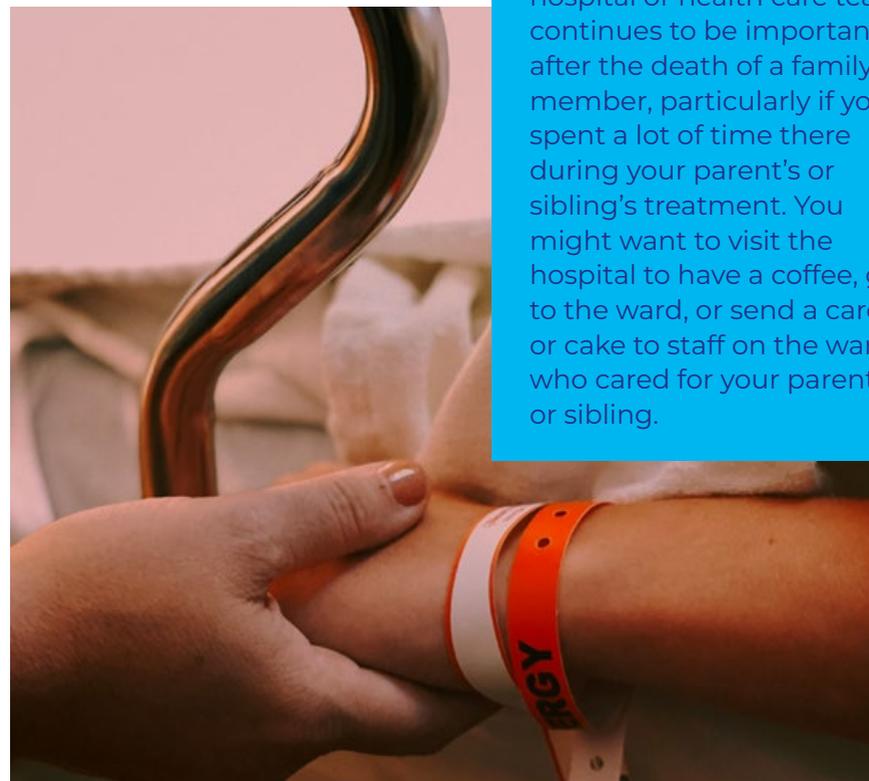
Ways to acknowledge special occasions

- Light a candle and say a special prayer or read a poem.

- Plant a favourite flower, shrub or tree. You can then visit it, decorate it or pick the flowers on anniversaries and other events that you would want to have shared with your parent or sibling.
- Create a card or an art piece. You can also write messages or attach photos.
- Cook your parent or sibling's favourite meal or just get together at a favourite restaurant.
- Visit their special place or somewhere you feel close to them.
- Create an online memorial and upload photos, write tributes or share details about their life.
- Do something you like such as have a massage, go to a movie, buy a new piece of clothing or jewellery.
- Get a piercing or tattoo as a permanent reminder of your parent or sibling. (You need to be over 18 to get a tattoo, even if you get a parent's permission.)
- Take part in a fundraising event (e.g. shave your head or complete a fun run) to raise money for a charity related to your parent or sibling's cancer.

The hospital

For some people, the hospital or health care team continues to be important after the death of a family member, particularly if you spent a lot of time there during your parent's or sibling's treatment. You might want to visit the hospital to have a coffee, go to the ward, or send a card or cake to staff on the wards who cared for your parent or sibling.



Spirituality and religious beliefs

Spirituality is a broad term for how you make meaning in the world – through nature, people around you, culture, tradition and religious beliefs. If spirituality or religion is a part of your life, it can provide you with comfort and support as you deal with your grief. This can be for several reasons:

Rituals – Spiritual and religious practices for death and mourning can provide structure and guidance, such as regular memorial services.

Sense of connection – Spirituality and religious beliefs often emphasize the connection between everyone. This may help you feel connected to your parent or sibling even though they are not around.

Meditation and prayer – These can provide comfort and promote a sense of inner peace.

Community support – The support from members of your

spiritual group or religious community can be valuable.

However, after the death you may find you question your religious and spiritual beliefs. You might be angry with your God, Allah, Creator for allowing the death to happen. It's common for people to question religion or spiritual beliefs during their life – it's just that grief may change the focus or make it more significant.

If you no longer want to follow the customs and rituals of your family's religion, you might notice conflict arise with the family about this.

Even if you are not into formal religion, you may develop an interest in other beliefs and types of spirituality. Often, it's a way to find some sort of meaning in what is otherwise just a really unfair and awful situation. It's okay to do whatever you're comfortable with.

You might want to talk about how you're feeling with a member of your faith or a pastoral carer.



PRACTICAL STUFF

PRACTICAL AND FINANCIAL HELP

Coping with practical and financial issues when you're grieving can be overwhelming, particularly if you're managing these issues for the first time. You've probably missed classes and work, and may be nervous about seeing classmates, teachers and coworkers again.



Returning to school, study, work

If your parent or sibling who had cancer was sick for awhile, then you may have realised that the rest of the world continues despite of what has been happening in your life.

Returning to school, study or work after someone has died can be hard and a big adjustment. You might feel nervous about how others will react and how you'll cope with their reactions.

Study

School

If you're in school, it can be a big part of your life. Some people say that dealing with grief may make it harder to study.

Challenges you may face include:

- finding it hard to concentrate or stay motivated to finish assignments or study for exams
- feeling tired because you're having trouble sleeping
- having less time to do homework because you have to do more around the house
- your work is not up to its usual standard
- not wanting to be around other people
- missing more school because of the physical symptoms of grief such as fatigue, headaches, stomach aches.

While you might not want to be treated differently, letting your teachers know about the death of your parent or sibling can help, as they may be able to offer support such as special consideration or additional time for assignments. If your teachers know what is happening, you'll probably find that they'll be more understanding and help you keep up with schoolwork. If you're missing classes, you can ask friends to let you know what's going on at school, or ask for the teacher to send you information.

The school may show support by sending you cards, holding a memorial service, raising money for a cancer charity or dedicating an area as a place of remembrance. Other schools might try to support you by helping you focus on your education while you are at school.

Some teachers will be super supportive, and others may not understand grief as much and might think you should be 'back to normal' after a certain time. Like other people, they may not understand that grief doesn't have a time frame, and you may have to remind them that you're still struggling.

Years 11 and 12

If you're doing your final school exams, you might need to speak to your teachers or the school counsellor about applying for special consideration. Lots of people get special consideration for different reasons. Special consideration doesn't give anyone special treatment, but it takes into account that you are impacted by a significant event. You can keep it between yourself and your teachers if you want to.

Tertiary study

If you're at uni or TAFE, let your lecturers, tutors or department heads know about your situation. They may be able to offer special considerations, extensions or other accommodations to help you cope with your study workload. Most uni and TAFE campuses have student services that provide counselling and support – get in touch with a counsellor who can help you get through these tough times.



Work

How you feel about returning to work after the death of a parent or sibling will vary. You may be eager to go back to work because the routine is a good distraction or find you can't focus and need more time off. If you can, go back when you feel ready.

Let your employer know about your bereavement and ask what time off you're entitled to. By law, many permanent full time and part time employees are allowed 'bereavement leave', but this is usually only 2-3 days. You may be able to take more time as leave without pay. You can find out more at fairwork.gov.au.

Once you're ready to return to work, you might want to ask about reducing hours or flexible hours.

If your work has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), you can call them for free, confidential counselling. You might find this is really useful after returning to work.

Expect a range of responses from your co-workers – from acting as though nothing has happened, to offering condolences in private, to publicly asking curious questions. Knowing this can help you prepare a range of responses. You might want to ask someone in advance to answer questions or let your co-workers know what has happened.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

Find a quiet space – There may be times during the work day when you need a quiet moment. Before you go back to work, think about where you can take a break. It can help to talk to a supervisor about this before going back to work.

Catch-up with co-workers before returning to work – Seeing co-workers for the first time since a parent or sibling has died might include questions about how you're coping or offering condolences. It can take the pressure off to see co-workers before formally returning to work as this is likely a briefer period of time, and you can leave when you feel ready to.

Check out *Getting support* on **page 45 – 46** for more info.



Take regular breaks – Going for a walk, doing some breathing exercises or meditating can recharge you when you are feeling overwhelmed. Some people say they felt extra tired for a while after going back to work.

Wills

A Will is a legal document that outlines someone's wishes about what should happen to their assets (e.g. house, money and other possessions) after they die. It can also record who will care for their children. A Will is generally only considered to be a legal document when the person who created it was aged 18 years or over at the time they wrote their Will. People who are aged under 18 years can still write down what they wanted to happen with their belongs after their death, but this may not be legally binding.

If there is a Will, someone will carry out the wishes outlined in the Will. This person (or sometimes several people) is called the executor. If you're responsible for managing

your parent's or sibling's affairs, get legal help from a solicitor with experience in deceased estates to help you work out the probate process. You can also contact the Public Trustee or Legal Aid in your state or territory if you need help to know how to start the process.

If there is no Will, this is called dying 'intestate'. The spouse, partner or a child will need to apply for a Grant of Letters of Administration to the Supreme Court. The law will decide how an estate will be divided. It also means that the law will decide who cares for children under 18. It is recommended that you seek legal advice from a solicitor with experience in deceased estates, the Public Trustee or Legal Aid in your state or territory if your parent or sibling died without a Will.

If possible, avoid making big decisions and changes in the first weeks after your parent has died. In fact, the general advice is to not make any major life decisions in the first year – although sometimes this may not be possible. Apart from the added stress, you may not be able to think clearly and end up making decisions that are not right for you and other family members. It can help to talk to a trusted family member or counsellor if you're making a major life decision and feeling unsure about what to do.



Managing money

For some of you, after the death of a parent or sibling you may have to step up and take on more responsibilities. This may involve learning new skills, such as managing money and budgeting, paying bills, grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning.

These tasks can feel hard and stressful, especially if you're doing them for the first time. It's okay to ask friends and family for help with everyday tasks while you are grieving.

You may have already been dealing with finances, banking, health

funds, Centrelink, Medicare and other Government Departments. You may be able to get help with things like:

- financial assistance – visit [servicessa.gov.au](https://www.servicessa.gov.au) for more information
- rent
- legal rights
- paying for electricity, gas, water, phone and internet (called a hardship variation) – talk to the companies that provide your electricity, gas, internet and water.

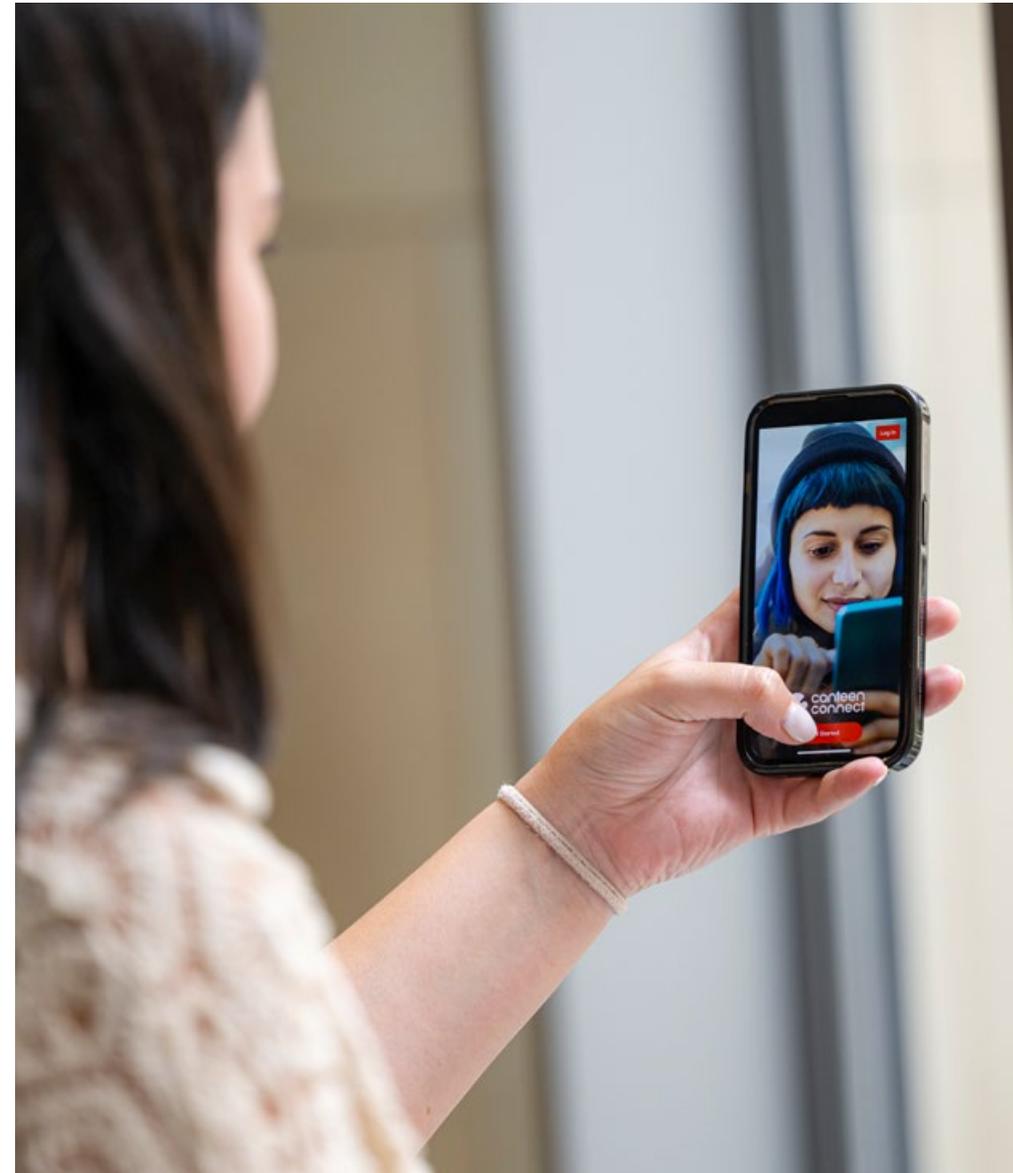
See *More information and support* on **page 63** for more details.

Make a budget	Help with cooking	Help with cleaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put aside money for essentials first – food, rent/mortgage payments, electricity and health care. Make a note on a calendar when the regular bills come in and need to be paid. Some bills allow you to pay a smaller amount on a fortnightly basis to avoid paying a larger bill at one time – talk to your provider about options. Plan your meals for the week and use this to write a shopping list for what you need. Use a shopping list and avoid temptations if your budget doesn't stretch. Do the grocery shopping when you've eaten already – shopping on an empty stomach can increase the chances of impulse buying. Supermarkets often advertise what items are on sale so it can help to research what you need and buy the items from the supermarket with the best value for money. Look for items on sale and buy fresh fruit and veggies that are in season. Buying non-perishable items in larger quantities or in bulk can save money in the longer term. Make a budget. List all the things you need to buy and pay for on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. Use an online tool such as moneysmart.gov.au/budgeting/budget-planner or download an app to your mobile phone. Get help preparing a budget for free. A financial counsellor can provide practical strategies and negotiate with people your family owes money to (creditors). To talk to a financial counsellor, call the National Debt Helpline on 1800 007 007 or visit ndh.org.au. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan your meals for the week - this can help with the shopping and help you feel more organised. Start with simple recipes that don't have too many ingredients or steps. Stock up on pasta, bottles of pasta sauce, pizza bases and other healthy pre-prepared meals. Buy some frozen meals to have as emergencies. Check out the freezer section of the supermarket – there are lots to choose from. Set aside one 'cooking' day a week and make big batches of food to freeze and then reheat when needed (or added to lunch boxes). Take care preparing and storing food to avoid foodborne illnesses. For tips on food safety, you can visit: foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumer/keeping-food-safe/key-tips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a list of cleaning tasks by day, week and month. Set-up a meeting with the rest of the family to work out who will do what and prepare a roster. This will ensure everyone knows what is expected of them and avoids someone feeling overburdened. Keep up with basic cleaning – wipe down the counters, wash the dishes, take out the rubbish and do your laundry. It's much easier to wash 2 or 3 plates than it is to wash a mountain of plates, cups and pots. It can help to listen to music or a podcast, or phone a friend as this will take your mind off the task. Expect that you or other family members might do things differently to you or how your family member did the jobs. Try to remember they are (like you) doing the best they can.

MORE INFORMATION

MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

These are some organisations and websites that can help you cope when a family member has died from cancer. We have included some of the most well-known sources for you.



Cancer support and information

Canteen 1800 226 833 canteen.org.au

Canteen helps you find the emotional strength you need to deal with cancer. We make cancer support stronger through connection – with other young people who ‘get it’ and with specialist staff who are always in your corner. We’re here for the tough stuff and for a break from cancer when you need it.

Canteen Connect
canteenconnect.org
Canteen Connect is an online community where you can connect with other young people impacted by cancer, check out events and chat to a counsellor.

Redkite 1300 722 644 redkite.org.au

RedKite provides services to help families who have had a child who has cancer, and have had a child die from cancer. You may be able to access bereavement counselling, financial support or other services. They also run a telephone support line.

Cancer Council 13 11 20 cancer.org.au

Cancer Council website has easy-to-read and clear information on lots of things about cancer including grief. From this site you can access the Cancer Council in your state.

Grief and loss

National Centre for Childhood Grief 1300 654 556 childhoodgrief.org.au

Provides programs and a safe environment for bereaved children and their families to share their experiences.

Feel the Magic 1300 602 465 feelthemagic.org.au

In person and online camps and grief resources for kids aged 7-18 after the death of a parent, guardian or sibling.

Grief Australia
grief.org.au
Online telehealth counselling service for people experiencing grief.

Grief Australia is an organisation that provides information about grief – and how to get through it. It also has links to other resources and information that offer support when someone is dying.

GriefLine 1300 845 745 griefline.org.au

Telephone and online counselling service and support groups for all Australians who have experienced a loss.

Reach Out au.reachout.com

Online support and information for young people going through tough times. Includes information on grief and loss, depression, self-harm and drugs and alcohol.

Counselling

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 kidshelp.com.au

Free and confidential online counselling service as well as other helpful information on dealing with tough things. Kids Helpline is also a crisis counselling service. Available by phone or webchat.

Lifeline 13 11 14 lifeline.org.au

Offers 24-hour crisis support by phone, text or webchat.

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636 beyondblue.org.au/youth

The youth website of Beyond Blue. You can call or chat online with a counsellor or join a forum to connect with people who are going through similar experiences to you. It has links to other support organisations.

Headspace 1800 650 890 headspace.org.au

Headspace is an Australian site that supports young people aged 12–25 with mental health issues.

Online and telephone support service for young people who don't feel ready to attend a headspace centre in person.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467 suicidecallbackservice.org.au

24-hour telephone and online counselling for people affected by suicide, for people who are at risk

of suicide, and people supporting those at risk of suicide.

Legal and financial help

Youth Law Australia (previously called Law Stuff) yla.org.au

Offer legal information for young people under 25 on drugs, alcohol, bullying, Wills or any other legal matters. Includes links to other legal sites.

Services Australia servicesaustralia.gov.au

Information on payments and services available to you after the death of a family member, and lots of other useful information like who to inform about the death.





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Living with grief after cancer

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This book is intended as a general introduction to the topic and should not be seen as a substitute for advice from doctors or other health professionals. All care is taken to ensure that the information contained here is accurate at the time of publication.