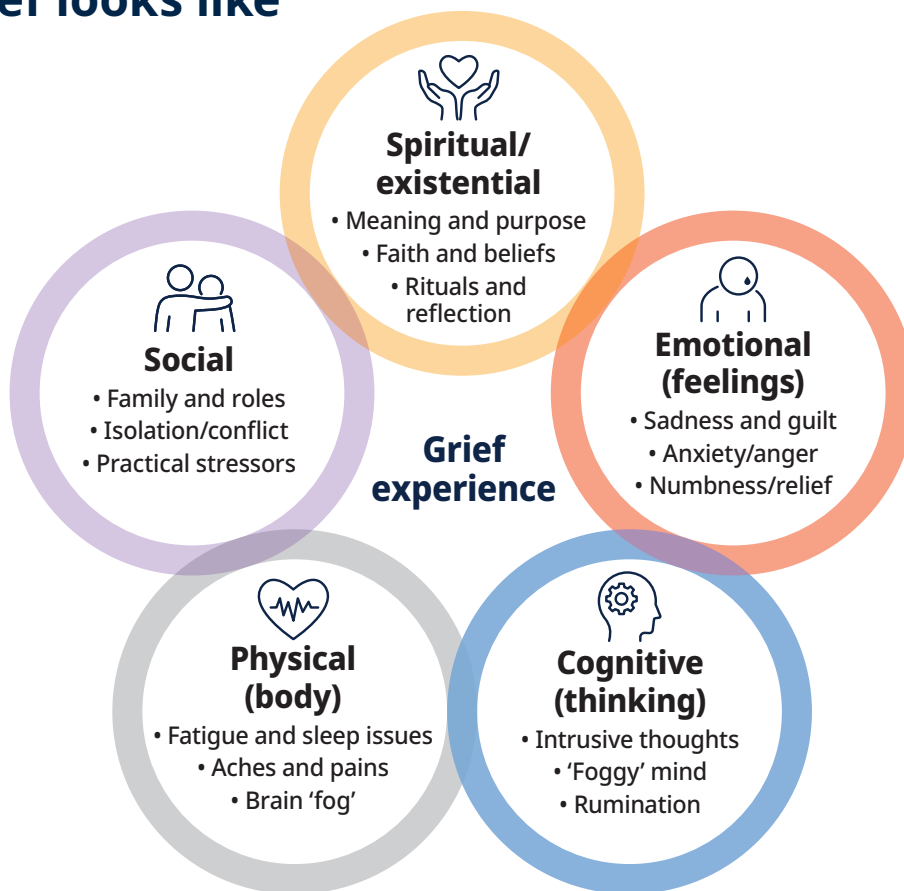


Grief and bereavement in palliative care

Practical factsheet for clinicians

Grief is a natural response to loss. It could be loss of life, or a loss of functioning, relationship or any other loss. It is highly individual and non-linear. It can begin before death (anticipatory grief), continue after death, and can affect a bereaved person's physical, emotional, spiritual and social wellbeing over time. Early recognition and supportive conversations by all clinicians can improve outcomes for patients and their families.

What grief looks like



Grief affects the whole person, and responses can overlap and change over time.

Who needs bereavement support?

While bereavement can be deeply painful, everyone needs empathy, support and kindness. Most people adapt with support from their existing relationships and community. Research supports a public health model of bereavement care, which recognises different experiences and needs.



Considerations for post-death support

1

Prepare (before the conversation)

- Choose a quiet, private space.
- Review key context, like their relationship to the deceased and recent events.
- Allow enough time to avoid rushing.

2

Start (opening the conversation)

- Introduce yourself, your role, and the reason for contact.
- Offer acknowledgement and condolences.
- Check if it's a good time to talk.

"I want to check how things have been for you since [Name of person] died – is now okay to talk?"

3

Explore gently

Ask how they feel grief has been impacting them.

- **Body:** sleep, appetite, energy.
- **Emotions:** feelings and thoughts.
- **Practical needs:** funeral, finances.
- **Social life:** relationships and connections.
- **Sense of meaning:** purpose and spirituality.

If appropriate, provide psychoeducation regarding grief, offer next steps or follow-up and check in again.

4

Interpreting support needs

Consider if there are any signs **over time** that the person is:

- **experiencing ongoing difficulties adapting** (withdrawal, ongoing dysfunction, hopelessness).
- **adapting** (connection, meaning, functioning, engagement with supports).

The goal is to understand how grief is impacting daily functioning, identify strengths and supports, provide emotional support, and strengthen coping and adjustment over time.

Please reach out to your local Grief and Bereavement Care Coordinator if you require any further information or support.

Gold Coast Hub
1300 618 486

Sunshine Coast Hub
1300 184 432

Townsville Hub
07 4433 7423

Cairns and Torres and Cape Hub
07 4226 6475

Calls are charged at the rate of a local call.