

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet:

Your Feelings : Dealing with Past Hurts and Traumas

When a young person has serious problems, it is a traumatic experience for the rest of the family too. One of the challenges you face is dealing with the effects on you. It is important to manage this, so that you can continue to be strong enough to support your child, live your own life and care for other family members too.

Grief and loss

If your child has complex needs and has experienced serious difficulties or traumas, you may be feeling a sense of grief or loss. You may have lost:

- Hope and dreams for yourself or your child
- Your image of your life and the future
- The person you thought you had in your child
- Control over your life
- The ability to cope with everyday things
- Your sense of trust or security
- Relationships or friendships
- Possessions

Your world view or the things you had faith in may have been shaken by these experiences. You may have lost a lot of confidence in yourself and your abilities. Your sense of identity may have been challenged.

Loss has a very strong emotional impact on people:

"Experiences of attachments with people, places and ideas are critical to our survival and our sense of wellbeing... when we inevitably lose some of these attachments, we typically feel an intense and distressing reaction to their absence". (Harms 2005)¹

The emotional response to loss is grief. People often think that grief is only about death, but other losses can trigger grief too.

Some of the feelings that may come with grief and trauma are:

- shock, numbness, disbelief, confusion
- sadness or anger

- guilt, anxiety, profound exhaustion, helplessness and yearning
- tears, emotional release and relief
- emotional loneliness, social withdrawal
- preoccupation with the person or object lost
- sleep and appetite disturbance.

People deal with grief differently

The way people feel and deal with grief differs. Some people feel intense feelings of pain during or soon after the experience; for others the feelings take longer to surface. There is no right or wrong way.

An essential first step is to give yourself permission to grieve. It also helps if others recognise that recovery will take time.

Feel your feelings

Feeling your feelings is important for recovery. Listen to your feelings and your intuition about what you need. Look after yourself.

You may feel like being on your own or you may feel like being with certain people who help you feel stronger. You may feel like crying all day. You may feel like going for a swim or a bushwalk, or pampering yourself. Honour your feelings and try to do what you need to in order to cope.

If you take the time to really tune in to your feelings, your deeper self will know what you need to do to recover. Tuning into yourself may be very foreign to you. You may need to get professional help if you are really unsure where to start.

1. Harms, L. (2005) 'Coping with loss and grief', Understanding human development: A multidimensional approach, South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, Chapter 8, p. 184

Time alone

Grief often makes us want to be alone or shy away from certain people in our lives. Sometimes we feel angry towards others around us. It is useful to be able to recognise if your need to reject others is part of your grief. It can help you let people know what you need, to help them understand.

Finding acceptance

Part of the task of grieving is to accept the new reality and find our way back to feeling more optimistic again.

It can help to consider how you are thinking about things, and whether you are being too negative or too hard on yourself. For example, you may think that you are not coping or you will never feel okay again. In reality you may be coping reasonably well for someone in your situation.

Make a list

When the time is right, make a list of all the things you have lost. Allow yourself time to cry and grieve over these things. This can be one small step towards accepting the situation. Make another list of things you still have in your life which are good. This may help you to feel more positive about your future. Remembering both positive and negative things can help bring a balanced picture of what has changed.

Blocking your feelings

It is common for people to respond to trauma by blocking out their feelings. This strategy can sometimes help us to cope in the short-term. It allows us to keep functioning and doing what we need to do from day to day. We postpone feeling the grief and trauma until we are in a better position to cope with it.

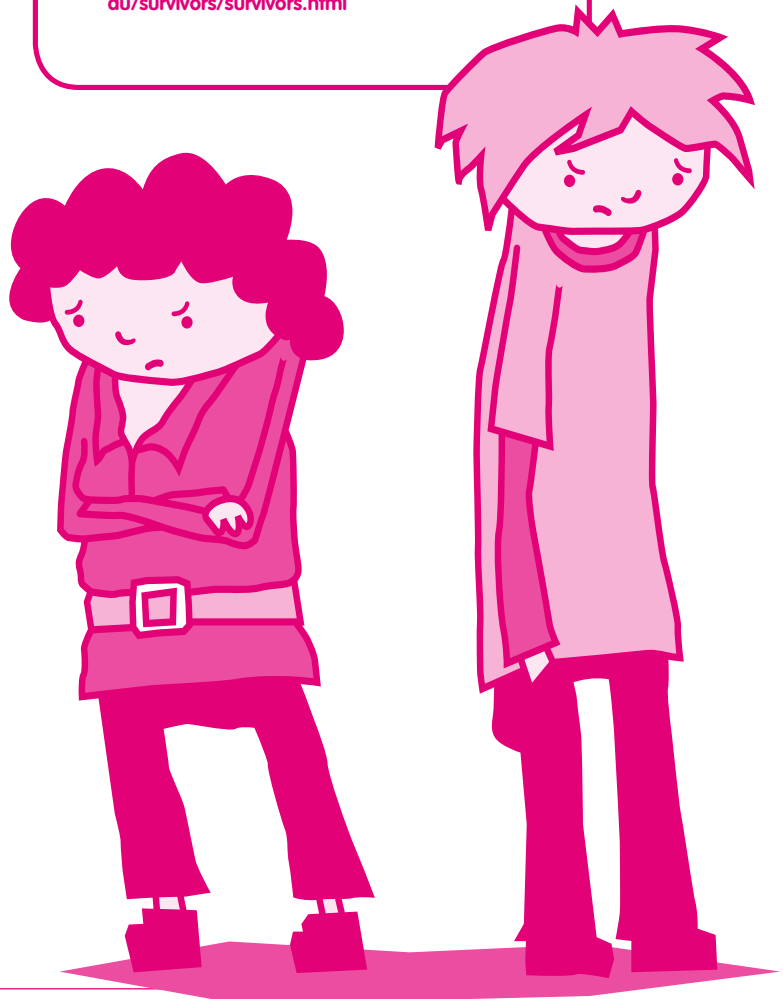
However we cannot begin to really heal until we let ourselves experience those feelings. If you are afraid to let yourself start dealing with your grief and trauma, it may be time to ask for professional help.

It is risky to use alcohol or medication to shut out feelings of grief and trauma. If you have become dependent on alcohol or drugs to cope with trauma in your life, you may need to seek some professional help to find healthier ways of coping.



Useful Resources

- Your GP (Family Doctor)
- Your local Community Health Centre offers counselling and other services. See www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth for information on your nearest centre.
- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, Clayton, VIC Ph: **03 95439449** or www.grief.org.au
- National Association for Loss and Grief Ph: **03 96503000** or www.nalagvic.org.au
- Australian Psychological Society (APS)
For Psychologists registered with the APS, this site allows you to search for psychologists in private practice, by location and specialisation, e.g. trauma or grief and loss
Ph: **03 86623300** or www.psychology.org.au
Go to: 'About Psychologists' > 'Find a Psychologist'
- Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse have information, explanations and recovery techniques for child abuse and trauma; <http://www.asca.org.au/survivors/survivors.html>



Support from others

It sometimes helps to talk to others who have been through very painful experiences and somehow managed. Ask what thoughts and strategies helped them to get through and to build their hope again. Ask them how they rebuilt damaged relationships in their family.

Support from other people in your family and community can help you to deal with trauma and grief. If you think that your pain is not acknowledged, or you are being judged by others, it makes it harder to deal with your feelings. If the people around you are not supportive enough, you may need to seek out support groups for people in situations similar to your own, or get professional counselling.

You can recover

If you have experienced a traumatic time, you will suffer for a while. But it is possible to recover, build coping skills, and bring enjoyment back to your life.



Tips from this Help Sheet

- No matter what the details of the situation are, you are likely to be experiencing a sense of loss. This will have a very strong emotional impact on you.
- The emotional response to loss is grief. People deal with grief differently.
- Listen to your feelings and your intuition about what you need to recover. Crying is healing.
- Part of the task of grieving is to accept the new reality and find our way back to feeling more optimistic again.
- Blocking out feelings will delay the healing process.
- It may help to talk to others who have been through very painful experiences and come out the other end. What thoughts and strategies did they use? Or you may need to seek some professional help.



Related Help Sheets

- [Need A Helping Hand?](#)
- [Keeping Calm](#)
- [Improving our Relationship](#)



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→ **Strong Bonds is a project of Jesuit Social Services.**

Jesuit Social Services work cooperatively with others to engage disadvantaged individuals, families and communities and the wider society to promote health and wellbeing and to address social exclusion.

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