

Spotlight:

# AFTER THE BUSHFIRE: GRIEF, LOSS AND RECOVERY.



A bushfire has the power to affect many people who were never even in the vicinity of the fires. Some people will experience it painfully and directly through personal loss or through someone they knew. Others may be sensitive to the relentless media coverage and find themselves becoming anxious about things that may have nothing to do with them directly or the events themselves.

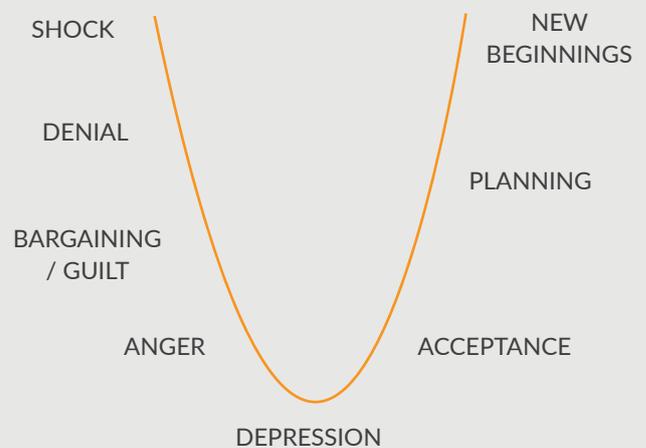
## We need to talk about grief

People experience grief in different ways. It is not necessarily a linear process. Some people may go back and forth feeling okay one day and utterly despairing the next. Individuals experiencing grief will criss-cross the spectrum of emotions as they work through the grief process. Many people struggle and progress and regress many times over as they work through the process. It is important to acknowledge the individuality of each grieving person and to be careful not to impose your expectations of grieving on others. This isn't the time to say "When my dad died..." That's why one of the most important things you can do is LISTEN.

1. Recognise that loss raises all sorts of feelings, and that even if unasked, people need your support and understanding, even if you think you're doing nothing but sitting with them.
2. Reality takes time. The process of recovery is linked directly to acceptance of the loss. Acceptance will not come until reality is faced.
3. Emotional release is not easy for everyone. Grieving people should be allowed to express their feelings. This may mean unfamiliar tears for some who are trying to remain 'strong' but they need to be reassured that it is normal to feel this way and express emotions openly.
4. Re-establishing the 'self' after loss is a roller coaster ride. Some people may surprise you and look fine but beneath their 'I'm ok' exterior, lies a lot of pain that may still be yet to surface, so be aware of this.

## Understanding the process of grief and loss

### THE GRIEF AND LOSS CURVE



## How can I help someone going through grief?

Here are some of the most common reactions to grief and ways you can respond.

### 1. SHOCK AND DENIAL

*Thoughts spinning out of control. Allows traumatic information to filter in but cannot process it. This is much worse now that news is 24/7 and on hand-held devices. They may seem stunned or startled.*

Supportive behaviour:

- Accept feeling of helplessness.
- Gently reassure. Try using body language and nodding or just taking their hand if they lean towards you. Talk is not always needed.
- Listen without judging.

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INFORMATION

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## 2. DISORIENTATION

*Confused in relation to time, place and person. May not remember what is happening, Unusually befuddled.*

Supportive behaviour:

- Expect that more time may be required and be patient, don't rush them.
- If you work with them, allow for errors and accept 'muddle-headedness'.
- Provide an environment where it is permissible for them to share their feelings or concerns.

## 3. EXPRESSIONS OF ANGER

*Ranging from mild frustration to intense rage. People may not know why they're angry but need permission to express it.*

Supportive behaviour:

- Being passive provides environment for expression of anger.
- See their anger as part of a survival response.
- If anger becomes destructive to self or to others, think safety first or seek help.

## 4. GUILT AND REGRET

*Often a pleading lament and expression of sorrow. The person is attempting to right wrongs.*

Supportive behaviour:

- Permit the expression of feelings.
- Don't judge the nature of the feelings. Just go with it.
- Allow the person to talk without interruption.
- Don't be tempted to offer premature reassurance - allow ventilation of the feelings, fears and concerns.

## 5. DEPRESSION

*Usually occurs weeks after the event, but signifies that finality is sinking in. They are listless, disinterested, may sleep a great deal, have no interest in seeing others. Have lost any sense of purpose in life.*

Supportive behaviour:

- Check that they have effective ongoing social support and check in with them regularly.
- If no obvious social support, actively encourage professional support.

## 6. BEGINNING TO REORGANISE

*A sense of logic and an ability to make plans for the future appears. Difficulties are much more of a functional nature. May see reappearance of guilt or anger, but this will generally pass.*

Supportive behaviour:

- Watch, check in and try not to get frustrated when they backslide. As we said earlier this process of recovery is not linear.

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As your EAP provider **Converge** is always here to listen.

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