

Grief on Father's Day



Father's Day is a time to honour dads and the connections between generations. It is not, however, a day of joy for everyone. For some people, it reminds them of what they have lost, and strong feelings such as sadness, anger or guilt may come up. It may be hard to avoid reminders of Father's Day as shops, the media and friends consider it a time of joy and celebration.

Some bereavements or losses can be particularly difficult to navigate, and there may be unrecognised losses such as the loss of hopes and dreams for the future. Some people who experience grief on Father's Day are those who:

- are grieving the death of their father, or a father figure,
- have experienced the death of a child
- are unable to become a parent
- are estranged from their family
- have seen changes in their father or father figure, such as when someone has dementia or a life-limiting illness.

People grieving on Father's Day may say things like:

- 'I have lost the only person who truly understood me and who gave me advice'
- 'I feel alone and scared'
- 'I didn't get a chance to 'set things right with Dad'
- 'I don't know who I am now'
- 'I am not sure if what I am experiencing is normal'

Some people may feel alone and vulnerable. Your age, their age, how they died, your relationships and the losses you are experiencing will affect how you grieve. It is important to remember that grief is unique and individual to you.

Children and adolescents may worry about things like:

- 'How is Mum going to cope?'
- 'Who will look after me now?'
- 'Was it my fault?'
- 'Who will take me to footy?'

Young people might think that it is their fault or that the world is unfair and unjust. It can be challenging for younger people to talk about grief because their peers may not understand.

You can do some things to make Father's Day a little easier.

- If you are young, try to talk to a trusted adult about what you need. You may feel you want to be left alone or express your grief differently to the adults around you.
- Sometimes we have to move through our grief and sit with our sadness. Although this can be hard, people say that grief is their connection to the person who has died.
- On Father's Day, do what feels right for you, that may be visiting the cemetery, spending time in nature, being alone or being with others.
- Make sure you take care of yourself as you navigate a potentially difficult time. Try to maintain your routine, get some sleep or some fresh air.
- Read or get some grief education as it can help to normalise what you are experiencing. Grief can affect our health, thoughts, feelings, behaviour and relationships. It can raise big questions of meaning and can also impact, and be impacted by, our spiritual beliefs.
- Quiet reflection can help you remember and adapt to loss. Looking through photos, watching videos, or journaling can often be helpful.

- When it feels like everyone is celebrating, finding ways to acknowledge your grief and being kind to yourself, may help you get through the day.
- Remember to go at your own pace, and as long as you are not harming yourself or anyone else, there is no right or wrong way to grieve.
- It can help to remember in a way that is meaningful to you. For example, you can continue to have a bond with the person who has died in ways such as doing an activity that they enjoyed, looking at photos, writing a letter, thinking about what they stood for in life or by sharing funny stories.
- Planning, choosing, and deciding about any significant time or anniversary can provide a sense of stability when things seem uncertain and scary. Plan how YOU want to spend the day.
- Reach out for professional support if you need to. Sometimes grief can feel overwhelming and you may not have people around you who can 'handle' your grief. We know that grief needs witnessing and talking to a qualified bereavement counsellor can be beneficial.

"If there ever comes a day when we can't be together, keep me in your heart. I'll stay there forever." From Winnie the Pooh by A. A. Milne

If you think that bereavement support may be beneficial for you, please contact the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement on 03 9265 2100 or at www.grief.org.au to talk to our friendly staff about online or phone counselling or support groups.

