

# GRANDPARENT GRIEF



**LION  
HEART**  
CAMP FOR KIDS

## WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT GRANDPARENT GRIEF?

Entering the phase of grandparenthood often brings deep emotional experiences. Alongside the joy of watching your family grow, there can be profound grief. You may have experienced the death of friends, parents, siblings or other Important People. Each of these deaths brings new insights into love, disappointment and the changing nature of family. When the death of a grandchild or adult child occurs, the grief can be overwhelming.

This kind of grief is layered. You are grieving the death itself while also witnessing the pain of your adult child or in-law, and the heartbreak of your grieving grandchildren. Trying to be strong for others while holding your own grief can feel chaotic and helpless. Some grandparents describe a deep sense of guilt, especially when the death feels like it disrupts the natural order of life.

This stage of life already involves transitions, such as retirement, downsizing or redefining relationships with your partner. Grief during this time can bring new challenges.

Many grandparents find themselves reflecting on these major life questions:

- **Generativity vs Stagnation (40 to 59 years):** The desire to nurture others and leave a legacy, or feeling a lack of purpose.
- **Ego Integrity vs Despair (60 years and older):** Looking back on life with a sense of peace, or feeling regret and sadness.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. You may feel joy, sadness, anger or even numbness, sometimes all in the same day. All of these feelings are valid. If you are a grandparent grieving the death of your grandchild or your adult child, please know that your grief matters too. You deserve support, and you are not alone.

## YOUR GRIEVING ADULT CHILD

Every parent, regardless of their child's age, feels deep pain watching their child suffer, especially when that pain cannot be alleviated. Instead of trying to fix the situation, which is impossible, allow them the space to express their feelings. They may minimise your grief, not because they don't care, but because their grief is all-consuming. Your child may feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities while also trying to grieve, and they might seek your comfort, support, and practical help. In some cases, they may lean on you as a 'safe' person to express their pain and emotions or may distance themselves from you.

## YOUR GRIEVING IN-LAW

Relationships with in-laws can be complex. Some may have strong connections, while others may find their relationship strained. Grief can amplify emotions, bringing out both the best and worst in people. As you grieve your child or grandchild, your in-law is mourning their spouse or child and may feel overwhelmed with their own responsibilities. They may desire comfort, support, and practical help from you, but if there was no prior relationship, they might withdraw in their grief, struggling to articulate their needs or desires for future family connections.

# GRANDPARENT GRIEF



**LION  
HEART**  
CAMP FOR KIDS

## YOUR GRIEVING GRANDCHILD & TEENAGER

Children express grief differently, depending on their age and developmental stage. What bereaved children need most is loving adults who can engage with them. Let them talk about their parent or sibling who has died, play with them, and enter into their world. Their grief may manifest more in play than conversation. Say the name of the person who has died, read them stories, and reassure them of your love and care.

Teenagers can be particularly tricky to navigate in grief. They may withdraw and process their feelings more privately or seek to confide in someone outside their immediate family. If they want to talk, listen actively. Spend quality time doing activities they enjoy and engage with the small things they share, cherishing these moments together.

## HOW GRANDPARENTS CAN HELP THEMSELVES

- Connect with friends or support groups outside the family to share your experiences.
- Allow yourself to feel and express the mixed emotions that accompany grief.
- Consider seeing a grief counsellor if needed; your grief is important and deserving of support.
- Take time for self-care and engage in activities that nurture you.
- Share memories of the deceased and find ways to honour their legacy.
- It's okay to say 'no' and set boundaries; know your limits.
- Consider journaling or writing letters to express your thoughts and feelings creatively.

## PRACTICAL WAYS FOR GRANDPARENTS TO SUPPORT THEIR FAMILY

- Offer practical help, such as babysitting, grocery shopping, or household chores, but within your emotional limits.
- Engage in activities with them, but avoid doing everything for them.
- Acknowledge the deceased by sharing memories and saying their name.
- Listen to their stories and encourage open communication without comparing grief experiences.
- Be mindful of important dates, as family members may observe these in their own ways.
- If you live far away, find creative ways to stay connected—send letters, texts, or share memories through video calls.

## GRIEF LATER ON

Grief doesn't have a time limit; it can emerge at different stages throughout life. For children, grief may manifest repeatedly as they grow and develop a deeper understanding of loss. Each developmental stage can trigger re-grief, as the impact of losing their Important Person unfolds in various ways. Similarly, for adult children and in-laws, grief can resurface during significant life transitions, such as dating or navigating new family dynamics.

It is essential to continue discussing the deceased and sharing memories, regardless of how much time has passed. Grief is a messy and ongoing journey that can forever change our lives. Create space for it, acknowledge it, and express it openly.