

Coping with grief before voluntary assisted dying

A guide for family and friends

Disclaimer: This guide provides general information for people supporting someone who has accessed voluntary assisted dying (VAD). It is not a substitute for professional advice. For more detailed information, scan the QR code. ➡



What is voluntary assisted dying (VAD)?

VAD is when a health practitioner assists a person with a terminal illness, disease, or condition to end their life.

Is VAD legal in Australia?

- Legal in all Australian states.
- ACT scheme begins November 2025.
- Not yet available in the NT.

Grief before VAD

The grief experience can be complex and personal. It is shaped by your relationship with the person, your beliefs and values, and the circumstances of their decision. When a loved one is preparing to access voluntary assisted dying, a mix of emotions may arise — sometimes all at once, sometimes in waves.

Common emotions before VAD may include:

- **Anticipation** – living with the awareness of a set date or timeframe; noticing “last” moments.
- **Guilt** – questioning if you’re doing the right thing by supporting the decision.
- **Anger** – at the illness, the system, or others who don’t understand.
- **Sadness** – grieving future plans before your loved one has died.
- **Isolation** – withdrawing from those who may judge or not understand VAD.
- **Regret** – “if only” thoughts, reflecting on past or fearing future regret.

These emotions are natural and valid.



Supporting yourself

Caring for someone choosing VAD can be emotionally and physically demanding. Supporting yourself is essential:

- **Connect with a support group** – share with others who understand.
- **Take breaks** – rest and recharge; ask others to step in.
- **Practice self-care** – prioritise your own wellbeing and do things you enjoy.
- **Seek professional support** – talk to a therapist or counsellor if needed.

Support from Griefline

- **VAD Support Groups**

Pre- and post-VAD support (with Dying with Dignity Victoria).

👉 Register online by scanning the QR code below.

- **National Helpline**

Free, confidential grief support.

📞 1300 845 745 | 8am–8pm (AEST), 365 days.

- **Online Forums** – Peer support available 24/7 at griefline.org.au/forums

Other support services

- **13YARN** – crisis support for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples (24/7).
- **Beyond Blue** – 1300 22 4636 (24/7).
- **Kids Helpline** – free counselling for ages 5–25 on 1800 551 800 (24/7).

More information

Scan the QR code to access VAD information, resources and support 👉 griefline.org.au/get-help/vad-support-groups

