

Coping with the loss of a community.

A guide to navigating the end of a sporting career.

Understanding the loss

Ending a sporting career, stepping down as a coach, or leaving a club role can bring grief that goes beyond leaving the game.

One of the most profound losses is often the community itself – the people, routines, and sense of belonging that were part of everyday life.

Some of the ways loss can appear, may include:

- Athletes missing teammates, training sessions, and the camaraderie of the locker room
- Coaches losing connection to players and the club environment that was central to daily life
- Club members and volunteers losing regular social interactions, purpose, and identity tied to the club



How this loss can impact other parts of life

The grief of losing your sporting community can ripple into other areas of life. It may affect relationships with family or friends, reduce motivation at work or study, and impact mental and physical wellbeing.

Recognising these signs in yourself or others is important; acknowledging the loss and its wider effects is the first step in finding support and rebuilding connection.

Common experiences of loss include:

- Feeling isolated or disconnected from people you were close to
- A loss of routine and purpose
- Anxiety about finding new social networks or community spaces
- Struggling to redefine personal identity outside of the sporting role



Practical tips for navigating feelings of grief and loss

Acknowledge the impact

- Recognise that losing a sporting community is a real form of grief.

Maintain connections

- Keep in touch with teammates, players, coaches, and the wider community is important
- Attend trainings and game days as a supporter
- Connect with team mates and coaches in other social settings
- Maintain connection through group chats, phone calls or text messages
- Volunteer as a coach or team manager

Seek support

Talking to friends, family, or professionals can help. Organisations like Griefline provide confidential support for grief and loss.

Create new routines and purpose

- Explore volunteering, mentoring, coaching, or joining other community groups to stay engaged.
- Maintain a daily routine similar to training life — morning activity, meal prep, sleep schedule, and goal setting.

Reflect on your contributions

- Celebrate the relationships you've built, the skills you've shared, and the impact you've made.



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Re-building after sport

Re-establish purpose

- Transitioning from our chosen sport brings along a transition from a primary purpose.
- Re-establishing purpose around family, community, mentorship, volunteering or learning a new hobby is vital for mental wellbeing.

Re-establish exercise balance

- Transition from high-intensity training to sustainable, enjoyable movement — e.g., yoga, Pilates, swimming, hiking, cycling, triathlons, hyrox, golf
- Incorporate functional strength and mobility training to maintain joint health and prevent injury.
- Prioritise active recovery — stretching, foam rolling, adequate sleep, and hydration.



Re-establish nutritional capacity

- Adjust caloric intake to match a lower training load.
- Focus on whole, nutrient-rich foods for long-term health — lean proteins, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats
- Consult a sports dietitian to create a balanced post-sport nutrition plan.

Re-establish relationships

Shifting away from sport can strain or reshape relationships. Being intentional about reconnecting helps maintain a sense of belonging:

- Reconnect with old friends outside of sport
- Invest in family time and shared activities
- Build new friendships through clubs, hobbies, or community groups
- Allow space for relationships to evolve as your identity shifts beyond the sporting role



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Moving forward and seeking support

Leaving a sporting role, whether as a player, coach, or club member, is not just about stepping away from the game. It is also a transition from a tight-knit community that supported your identity, purpose, and connection. Recognising this loss and finding ways to maintain relationships and purpose can help navigate this challenging period.

Support from Griefline

If a customer is showing signs of grief, staff may wish to share information about Griefline's free services:



National helpline: 1300 845 745 (8am–8pm AEST, 365 days a year)



Visit griefline.org.au to access information and support resources, including articles, eBook, podcast, stories of lived experiences and translated fact sheets



24/7 online peer-to-peer moderated forums to connect and share with others who understand

Interested in mental health literacy education with OTLR?



<https://www.instagram.com/otlr/>



<https://otlr.org.au/otlr-programs/>



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Scan the QR code to read about the Griefline and OTLR collaboration.



This resource was developed in collaboration between Griefline and OTLR. It is offered as a service to our community to provide support and information for people experiencing grief and loss, as well as their carers. The content is intended for educational purposes only and should not be taken as a substitute for medical advice from a GP or qualified mental health professional.



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