

Understanding grief and road trauma

Providing guidance, and support options for people affected by road trauma and grief.

What is grief?

Each year, thousands of Australians are impacted by road trauma. People may experience a wide range of common reactions, including physical injuries or symptoms, difficulties with concentration or memory, and strong emotional responses.

Road trauma can be especially distressing because of its sudden, violent, unpredictable, and often preventable nature. Losses that occur in this way can feel shocking, overwhelming, and deeply unfair.

This type of grief is unique in being random, unexpected, and outside anyone's control, which can make the healing process more complex.

If you or someone you know has been affected by road trauma, please know that these reactions are common, understandable, and that support is available. You do not have to navigate this alone.



How grief may show up

Road trauma may trigger a combination of grief and trauma responses, including:

- Intense sadness, disbelief, numbness
- Anger, guilt, shame, and/or a sense of injustice
- Flashbacks or intrusive memories of the crash
- Sleep problems, exhaustion, feeling "on edge"
- Difficulty concentrating, memory problems, poor attention
- Withdrawal from social life or activities
- Fear or anxiety about being on or near roads
- A feeling that "life stopped" the day of the crash/loss of what was before the crash

The impact of road trauma on wellbeing

In addition to this, the need to address immediate problems such as funerals, legalities and insurance claims can mean that dealing with and attending to one's trauma and grief is pushed aside, which can later return with great force.

For some, the ongoing legal or investigatory process can delay emotional recovery, while others may feel isolated when friends or family don't fully understand the depth of their pain.



How to support someone after road trauma

If someone you care about has been bereaved by a road incident:

- Acknowledge the loss and trauma
- Listen without fixing
- Avoid clichés
- Offer practical help
- Encourage professional support
- Check in often
- Look after yourself too

Remember

Grief after road trauma isn't just about loss; it's about shock, disruption, and often unanswered questions. With compassionate support and the right care, people can find a way to live alongside their grief while honouring the memory of those they've lost.

Where to find support



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



Counselling sessions are free of charge and confidential for people affected by a road collision, whenever this may have occurred. Sessions may be conducted online, face-to-face or by telephone.



1300 367 797 (9 am – 5 pm, Monday to Friday)



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