

Loss and Grief

Ideas for Support and Conversations Handbook

For Community Centres in SA

A Collaboration with



Supported by Office of Ageing Well Grant SA



Compassionate Communities SA is a program of



*We are inclusive. We celebrate multiple approaches and points of view.
When we say palliative care is everybody's business, no matter their age, we mean everybody.*

Acknowledgements

Our organisation acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and seas on which we live and work, and pays respect to Elders - past, present and emerging.

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Download at
www.communitycentressa.asn.au/ and
www.palliativecaresa.org.au/



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Introduction

Grief and loss are a universal experience, yet it often remains unspoken — tucked away behind closed doors, misunderstood, or quietly endured. Community centres, as trusted hubs of connection and care, are uniquely positioned to change this. By creating space for conversations about loss and grief, and offering accessible support options, community centres can provide a lifeline to individuals navigating some of the most difficult moments in their lives.

This handbook has been developed through a co-design activity and explores how and why community centres can become safe, supportive environments where grief is acknowledged, compassion is shared, and healing begins.

Why It Matters

Loss affects everyone: the death of a loved one (person or animal), the end of a relationship, loss of health, employment, or identity — each brings its own form of grief. For many, especially the elderly, marginalised, or socially isolated, the absence of emotional support can deepen suffering and delay healing.

Community centres are often the first point of contact for people who seek connection. They are places where individuals already gather for belonging, routine, and meaningful activity. By gently integrating grief-related support, centres can normalise conversations around loss, reduce stigma, and build a culture of empathy and resilience.

This handbook offers practical tools, ideas, and resources to help community centres integrate grief and loss conversations and support into their programs — with care, sensitivity, and intention. Whether through a gardening group, a pet-support program, storytelling sessions, or simple companionship, every interaction can be an opportunity for healing.

Together, we can make sure no one experiences grief and loss alone.



“Grief is the price we pay
for love.”

Queen Elizabeth II



Community Activities Ideas

1. Community Garden Day: A Gentle Space for Grief and Healing

Promotion suggestion:

Join us for a peaceful day in the garden, created especially for those who are experiencing grief and loss.

Whether you're remembering a loved one, processing change, or simply needing quiet companionship, the garden offers a place to reflect, connect, and heal — at your own pace.

Ideas to include in the day:

- 🌱 Gentle gardening activities (planting, watering, tending)
- 🪑 Quiet spaces for reflection and remembrance
- 💬 Light conversation and optional guided sharing
- 📖 Access to grief resources and community support
- ☕ Tea, coffee, and warm conversation with caring volunteers

2. What Matters Most Banners

Background:

What Matters Most Banner was designed with Palliative Care SA and the Midway Road Community Centre - a simple concept to stimulate a conversation

What to include in the activity:

- Email Community Centres SA and request to borrow the banner for your activity
- Buy post-it notes and sharpies for people to write on
- Put the banner in a public space in the community centre
- Start with asking your staff and volunteers ask them to write a post-it note of 'what matters most'
- Share a story about this activity in your newsletter and on socials



***“When communities speak
openly, healing begins — not in
answers, but in understanding.”***





3. Information Sessions with local experts

Steps to commence:

Reach out to your local experts: counsellors, funeral directors, lawyers, health care providers and ask them to volunteer to be a guest speaker at a information session at your community centre.

Promotion suggestion:

Join us for a series of compassionate and informative sessions led by expert speakers in grief support, counseling, and healing.

Whether you're navigating your own loss, supporting someone else, or simply want to understand grief better, these sessions offer:

- Insightful presentations
- Practical strategies
- Opportunities to ask questions
- A supportive, non-judgmental space

4. Grief and Loss Talking Benches

Background:

Creating Grief and Loss Talking Benches is a beautiful way to provide a safe, welcoming space for people to share their feelings, reflect, or simply find comfort in community.

What to include in the activity:

- Select a peaceful, accessible spot where people feel comfortable and safe
- Consider a bench that invites reflection — simple, sturdy, and comfortable. Maybe add a plaque *“This is a Grief and Loss Talking Bench, it is a space for sharing, listening, and healing.”*
- Provide a sign nearby explaining the purpose: that it's a space to talk about grief, loss, or just be with others quietly. Include guidelines like respecting confidentiality, listening without judgment, and being kind.
- Share information through community newsletters, social media, or local events.
- Organise occasional “Talking Bench” gatherings, where people can meet for informal chats or storytelling.
- Regularly check and maintain the bench and surrounding area.

5. Treasure Mapping

Background:

Treasure Maps identify and share local treasures.

What to include in the activity:

- Download the *CCSA Compassionate Communities Treasure Mapping Cheatsheet* from Community Centres SA or Palliative Care SA's website
- Follow the instructions and share

Learning Opportunities

TLC Connector

Talk Listen Connect (TLC) Connector training is a 1.5-hour international introductory level community education program. It is a citizen activation training program. We aim to support as many people as possible to take part in our TLC workshops, build their skills and confidence to make a difference in their community, workplace and neighbourhood.

www.palliativecaresa.org.au/tlc-connector/

PalliLEARN

PalliLEARN is eight 1-hour introductory level community education courses. These courses aim to build community knowledge, death literacy, compassion literacy and community capacity in relation to serious illness, dying, death and grief by providing quality and easy to understand courses.

www.palliativecaresa.org.au/pallilearn/

Last Aid

Last Aid is a 4-hour international standardised introductory level community education program.

www.palliativecaresa.org.au/last-aid/

Volunteer Hot Topic Webinars

Volunteer Hot Topic Webinars are 30 minute live/watch later webinars with guest speakers discussing particular topics in the context of volunteering.

www.palliativecaresa.org.au/volunteeringsahub/



Awareness Raising Activities

Raising awareness and celebrating meaningful days and weeks of recognition is a powerful way for community centres to support members who are experiencing grief and loss.

These moments provide a natural opportunity to:

-  Display helpful resources and support information
-  Show your centre's commitment to being a safe, supportive space
-  Stimulate open conversations around grief, remembrance, and healing
-  Celebrate resilience and honor the lives of those who have passed
-  Connect community members with shared experiences and support services

By participating in these special days your centre can create visibility, break down stigma, and let grieving individuals know you care.

National Advance Care Planning Week _ March

National Advance Care Planning Week, is the perfect time to have a conversation with your loved ones and health providers so they know what matters most to you and respect your treatment preferences.

<https://www.advancecareplanning.org.au/advance-care-planning-week>

National Palliative Care Week _ May

National Palliative Care Week, is the perfect time to raise awareness that everyone is affected by serious illness, dying, death and grief.

<https://palliativecaresa.org.au/national-palliative-care-week/>

Dying to Know Day _ August

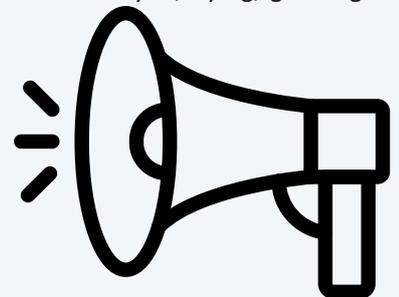
Dying to Know Day, is the perfect time to encourage open and honest conversations about death and dying.

<https://proveda.com.au/community-programs/dying-to-know-day/>

World Compassionate Communities Day _ November

World Compassionate Communities Day, is the perfect time to celebrate wonderful people around the world doing amazing things reducing loneliness, supporting people who are seriously ill, dying, grieving or caregiving

<https://www.phpci.org/worldccday-resources>



Volunteering Role Opportunities

Review your volunteer roles to consider how they could support people who are experiencing a loss or grief. This may be roles that connect and bring people together. Or they may be roles that help them to get out and about.

Below are some ideas.

✓ Biography Writing / Life Story Writing

A biography writing or life story writing volunteer can be a powerful support for someone who is grieving. For example this can support them to preserve memories, give them an opportunity to express how they are feeling and create a legacy for the person or animal that has died.

✓ Transport Support

Transport support volunteering can play a quiet but crucial role in helping someone who is grieving. While it may seem like a practical service, it can deeply impact emotional well-being as well. For example this reduces isolation, provides gentle companionship and helps to create a routine.

✓ Garden Care

Garden care volunteering can be a gentle and profoundly healing way to support someone who is grieving. For example this creates a quiet space for reflection. Gardens are naturally symbolic of growth and reflection. It also creates a sense of purpose. This might be a community garden or your volunteers helping in their gardens.

✓ Pet Helping

A pet helping volunteer can provide meaningful comfort and relief to someone who is grieving. Pets are often a source of deep emotional support, and caring for them during grief can be both healing and, at times, overwhelming. For example by offering to walk their dog with them can help them to have a safe space for companionship or by volunteers being available to care for their pet, they might feel more encouraged to take a break or visit family.

Visit the Palliative Care Volunteer SA project hub for more information in about volunteering in this area: <https://palliativecaresa.org.au/volunteeringsahub/>



Online tools

Support	Description	Website
CareSearch	Relevant and trustworthy information and resources about palliative care	www.caresearch.com.au
Carers Gateway	Emotional and practical supports for carers	www.carergateway.gov.au/
My Grief App	Support for grieving people and those who support them	www.grief.org.au/ga/ga/Support/My_Grief_App
HELP APP	Building your support network around people at the end of life	healthyendoflifeprogram.org/help-app/
A Part of Me App	A game and tool to help young people explore grief	www.apartofme.org
Grief Link	Information for people who are dealing with grief	grieflink.org.au
End of Life Law	Information about the legal aspects	end-of-life.qut.edu.au/
The Compassionate Friends Australia	Assist bereaved families in the rebuilding of their lives after the death of their child,	tcfa.org.au
Lifeline Toolkit	Help you process your loss, find hope, and move forward.	toolkit.lifeline.org.au/topics/grief-loss/tools-and-apps-for-coping-with-grief



Engaging your Staff and Volunteers



1 Training for your team

Create an opportunity for your team to watch the “Showing up for grief”

1. Download the Guide:
<https://www.deathliteracy.institute/showing-up-for-grief-program>
2. Watch the three video together in a group and work through the Guide
3. Create the space of open discussion

3 Share success stories

Share success stories and feedback from community members regarding the activities your community centre has created.

2 Create Opportunities for Contribution

Engage them in co-creating initiatives, this might be ideas for new activities or designing posters. Everyone has a role to play and can contribute to the activities.

4 Providing support

Sometimes team members might need extra support. You can contact the SA Bereavement Navigators: [1800 725 548](tel:1800725548) (PALLI8)

Supports for you to be aware of

There are a range of supports and opportunities available to help you engage your community in meaningful conversations around loss and grief. Some of these are listed below. We encourage you to reach out, explore what's available, and discover how these resources can support your community centre initiatives in this important area.

Whether you're starting a small project, looking to train staff or volunteers, or seeking inspiration from other grief-support programs, there is help available — you don't have to do it alone.

Support	Description	Website
Palliative Care Connect	Palliative Care and Bereavement Navigation	www.palliativecareconnect.com.au
Carers SA	Support for Carers	www.carerssa.com.au
Grief Australia	The leading voice on grief in Australia	www.grief.org.au
Palliative Care SA	The leading voice on palliative care in South Australia	palliativecaresa.org.au
Multicultural Communities Council of SA	Peak organisation serving, empowering and advocating for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in SA	www.mccsa.org.au
Advance Care Planning Australia	Supporting people to plan for your future health care	www.advancecareplanning.org.au/
Palliative Care Volunteering SA	A project to support the growth of palliative care volunteering roles	www.palliativecaresa.org.au/volunteeringsahub/
Good Death Impact Network	A group creating change and improve outcomes for everyone when someone dies.	www.gdin.com.au
Compassionate Communities SA	A project growing networks of support around people in the last chapter of life	www.palliativecaresa.org.au/CCSAhub



Palliative
Care is...

about the
whole person



for the
entire dying
journey
about

for
every age &
every stage



about the
community
of care

choice, autonomy
& dignity



about living



not
'one-size
fits all'



Everyone's
business



care for
the carer



a human
right



Palliative Care.
It's more than
you think.



We are agile because communities are always changing.

Our practice is evidenced based, incorporating research and voices from our community and member organisations. We build capacity and promote best practice community development through online and face to face training and education. Through advocacy we seek to change conditions that create fair and just communities. Through policy development, pilot projects and research we nurture a culture of continuous improvement.

Through partnerships and alliances we innovate, create, trial, evaluate and scale up

About Community Centres SA



We strive to create a community where members say: ***“everybody has a role to play in supporting each other in times of serious illness, dying, death and grief. We are ready, willing and confident to have conversations about living, dying and grieving well and to support each other in emotional and practical ways.”***

Palliative Care South Australia’s mission