



GRIEF AND LOSS FOR KINSHIP CARERS

Key points

- Becoming a kinship carer (including grandparent carer) can be a time of mixed emotions, including feelings of grief and loss, anger, shock, sadness and surprise.
- It is important for you to look after your emotions, physical health and relationships.
- Adjusting to incoming children and young people can be difficult for biological children. The adjustment and the resulting changes in the relationship between foster parents and their children can lead to behavioural changes in the biological children (Wilkes, 1974 in Younes and Harp, 2007).
- Biological children of kinship carers can go through their own process of grief and loss regarding their family structure and possibly disruptive behaviour of a new child or young person in the family.

Grief and loss for kinship carers

Becoming a kinship carer can be a time of mixed emotions for carers. On the one hand you have the opportunity to nurture and raise a growing child, giving them a stable home to navigate the ups and downs of life. On the other hand you may be grieving the loss of years that you thought would be spent in retirement or even dealing with shock, surprise or anger if you were not expecting the situation.

It is important to work through the emotions that you are experiencing. Working through your emotions will help you to better manage them and stay emotionally strong which in turn helps your own children (where applicable) and child/children in out-of-home care to stay strong.

Healthy ways to work through your emotions include:



Give yourself time to accept your change in circumstances and the emotions that come with it.



Focus on the positives and keep the negatives in perspective.



Take a few minutes for self-care (see information sheet on self-care for carers).



If you are feeling overwhelmed by emotions, try and take a short break from the child if this is safe to do so. For example, you could sit outside with a cup of coffee to calm down.



Seek parenting information from sites such as raising children or parenting helplines. This might help you feel more in control of your situation.



Talk to family, friends, your GP or a counsellor about your emotions.

For more information about being a grandparent or kinship carer, see the [Raising Children Network](#) or [Raising Grandchildren](#). [This list](#) of resources from Shine For Kids also has links to useful sites for grandparent carers.

For more information on grief and loss see this [information sheet](#) from **Beyond Blue**



Grief and loss for biological children

Biological children can be significantly impacted when a new child or young person in out-of-home care is brought into the family. It is likely that even with discussions with children about having a new child/children come to live with the family, that this will not be sufficient preparation for the reality of having a new child/children living with the family. While children may have provided input into the fostering decision, ultimately that decision may have been made by the parents and imposed onto the rest of the family.

Further, parents are often torn between responding to the needs of the vulnerable child/children that they have brought into the home whilst also responding to the needs of their own biological children. Issues of jealousy, competition, fear and anxiety can surface. Some biological children report feeling uncomfortable in their own home after the arrival of children in out-of-home care. Despite these challenges, biological children can learn to adjust to the changes in their home life.

Helping your biological child adjust to fostering

- Talk openly with your children about the reasons why children and young people in out-of-home care need homes.
- Spend time with your biological children and reaffirm that you love them.
- Give your biological children the opportunity to speak openly about their experience. Take a non-judgemental approach to hearing their experiences and validate them.
- Consider whether talking to a counsellor might be beneficial for your own children in helping them adjust to the new situation.

Find out more information on helping children and teens through change.

Supporting a child through grief and loss

Helping your teen cope with change



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