

## FACT SHEET 13

# Grief and Loss

Having a baby with limb difference or a child who is facing an amputation is likely to trigger a mix of emotions for you and your family. As a parent you've probably spent time dreaming about what the future may hold for your child and making plans for your family. Learning that your child has (or will soon have) a limb difference might cause you to doubt these future plans.

Many parents feel a great deal of sadness at the idea that this eagerly anticipated future might be taken away. If you feel like you're on an emotional roller-coaster then rest assured that this is normal. Feeling sad about these changes is also normal and it is okay – even a good thing - to grieve about the potential impact of a limb difference on your child's future. Acknowledging that things will be a little different from now on and adjusting to this change may take time.

This Fact Sheet provides information about how to help your child, yourself and others to grieve and adjust. There are also links to organisations that are specifically there to support people experiencing loss or grief.

## Helping your child to grieve

If your child was born with a limb difference he or she will naturally develop ways of adjusting to and accommodating their limb difference. That isn't to say that your child won't experience some challenges from time-to-time though. For example, your child may wish he or she wasn't different to friends or might be sad about missing all or part of a limb.

If your child has an acquired limb loss (an amputation) he or she will likely undergo a time of physical and emotional adjustment. Your son or daughter may sometimes feel sad and ask why this has happened or may be frustrated by their physical differences.

At times children with limb difference might take their emotions out on parents as you will be involved in making decisions (especially regarding their recovery and prosthetic decisions) throughout their childhood and adolescence.

The most important thing is to keep talking about how you all feel. Encourage your child to ask questions and answer these as honestly and openly as you can. Remember that we are all individuals – we all differ physically and emotionally and we all have different and unique gifts and talents. Reinforcing that message with your child can assist them to understand that 'being different' is not that unusual.

## Allowing yourself to grieve

The feelings associated with grief can often be painful, distressing and overwhelming at times. Grieving can take time, pass altogether or re-appear throughout your life (particularly as your child experiences different transition periods or challenging issues). It is important to look after yourself and not dismiss any feelings of grief. You should:

- > **Be kind to yourself.** Allow yourself the time and space to experience and deal with your emotions. Spend time with supportive friends and family and give yourself the best chance at keeping stress levels low by eating well, getting some rest and taking some exercise.
- > **Take some time out.** Try to allow yourself time away from the grief. It is okay to laugh, have fun with family and friends and not feel guilty about doing this.
- > **Don't compare yourself to others.** Remember that all people cope differently. Some people will move through the grieving process quite quickly but for others it might take longer to adjust.
- > **Talk and share feelings with others.** Talk about how you feel. Share your feelings with loved ones and let them share their feelings as well. Try to be as open and honest as you can.
- > **Peer support.** Speaking with other parents who have a child with a limb difference may provide you with insights that your non-affected family and friends simply cannot provide. Limbs 4 Kids can put you in touch with a trained Peer Support Volunteer who is a parent or carer of a child with a limb difference.

## Accessing support

Should you think that your child, you or another person close to you needs assistance to manage their grief, there are a number of services you may want to access. You may want to consider speaking with your GP, a Social Worker or a Psychologist.

You may want to speak to a Limbs 4 Kids team member who can assist you. You may also want to speak to another parent who has experienced what you are going through. If so, Limbs 4 Kids can connect you to a trained Peer Support Volunteer who you can speak to you. Visit our website or call us for more information and links to our online support.

In addition, a number of organisations exist to specifically assist people who are grieving, including:

### Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

[www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)

### Beyond Blue

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

### Genetic Support Network Victoria

[www.gsnv.org.au](http://www.gsnv.org.au)

### Lifeline

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

### Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia (PANDA)

[www.panda.org.au](http://www.panda.org.au)