

Dealing with grief and loss



A resource for parents and carers of a young person who identifies as transgender, gender diverse or non-binary, or who are questioning their gender identity.

Grief and loss are a common experience for family members and caregivers. You are not alone in feeling them. It is normal for anyone to experience an emotional response when there are big changes in the life of a person you have known for a long time.

You might experience thoughts like these:

I felt sad, then I felt bad for feeling that way. I didn't want my child to think I was upset at them. I just needed time to understand. I learned it's okay to feel more than one thing; love and sadness can happen at the same time.



There is no talk about grief and loss for the parent. Hearing the name you lovingly chose for your child is now a dead name is excruciatingly painful. How does a parent get over that?



I cried, but I didn't know why. Nothing bad happened, but I felt like something had changed. I missed the old name, the old photos. I felt sad, even though my child was still here. It was confusing.



It felt like I was losing the child I thought I knew. When my child told me they are trans, I was surprised. I love them, but I felt sad too. I had pictures in my head of who they were. Now things are different, and I had to let go of those ideas.



I used to think about the future — what they might wear at a wedding, or the things we would do together. Now I know it will be different. I still love them, but I felt a bit lost for a while.



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Navigating these feelings

For many families, parents, carers or siblings, finding out that a young person in their care or household is trans, gender diverse or non-binary might lead to a range of different feelings, both positive and negative. Fear, confusion, grief and loss are some of those feelings. These feelings might come up shortly after finding out, or later on.

Not all families, parents, carers or siblings experience feelings of grief and loss, but some do. And some might feel overwhelmed and find it difficult to understand or process these feelings.

This is called **ambiguous grief** – and it's common for parents to feel this. It feels more like a type of grief or loss that does not go away, feels unresolved or doesn't have an end.

What you can do:

- Take your time – It's okay to feel unsure. Feelings can take time to work through.
- Talk to someone – You can speak to a friend, a support group, or a counsellor.
- Keep showing love – Your child still needs your love, support and care.
- Learn a little at a time – Try reading or listening to stories from other parents or trans people.
- Remember: your child is still your child – They are just helping you see them more clearly.
- Write it down – If you feel overwhelmed, writing your thoughts or questions can help.

What you should not do:

- **Don't keep your feelings to yourself** – you deserve support too.
- **Don't blame your child** – this is not anyone's fault.
- **Don't rush** – it's okay if things feel new or strange right now or later. You don't have to understand everything right away.
- **Don't ignore your child's feelings** – they may also be scared or unsure.



Why Support Matters

- When kids feel loved and safe, they are happier and healthier.
- Kids who are supported at home do better at school and in life.
- Living in an environment that is not supportive is linked to poor mental health, homelessness and suicide.
- Support from family and caregivers leads to higher self-esteem and better mental health.