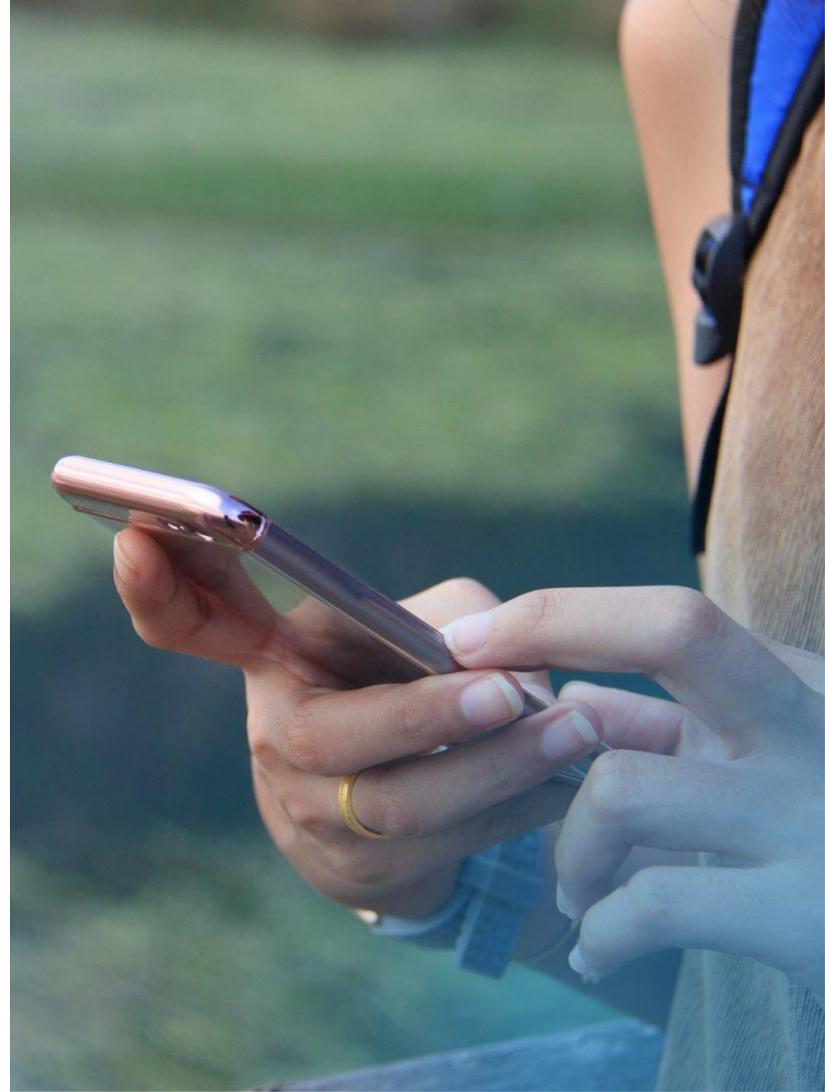


Online forums

Supporting help-seekers as a
Volunpeer



Online moderated forums

Launched at the end of 2020, Griefline's [online moderated forums](#) offer an opportunity for individuals, including those who may be rural or remote, to connect with an emotionally supportive community, share experiences and find hope.

- Accessible 24/7
- Peer to Peer space
- Over 2,000 registered users

Latest forum topics

Prevention

Early Intervention

Loss of a pet 1 2

Started by: [onlinecommunity](#) in: [Loss of a pet](#)

Death of my grandmother

Started by: [stareyeddreamer](#) in: [Loss of a loved one](#)

Lost my 22 y.o. daughter to cancer 8 weeks ago

Started by: [jbrown74](#) in: [Loss of a loved one](#)

Missing my hubby

Started by: [patches63](#) in: [Loss of a loved one](#)

Holding back the tears

Started by: [healingwords](#) in: [Loss of a loved one](#)

Festive season makes it really hard

Started by: [onlinecommunity](#) in: [Personal relationships](#)

My Billy

Started by: [patches63](#) in: [Loss of a pet](#)

Struggling to prepare with loosing my Mum.

Started by: [turtle](#) in: [Loss of a loved one](#)

Lost struggling and grieving still

Started by: [tidd](#) in: [Loss of a pet](#)

The positive attributes of Online Support Groups

Qualitative studies find many positive attributes of online support groups for bereaved users

- An emotionally supportive space where grief can be openly expressed any time;
- The users' experiences of grief is understood, accepted, and normalised;
- Being part of an understanding community of persons who have experienced a similar loss;
- Sharing of information;
- Remembrance;
- Reconstruction of a sense of identity;
- A realisation of the changing nature of grief over time ([Robinson, 2019](#))

The benefits of supporting help-seekers through the Griefline online forums

- Provide support to help-seekers who are unable to get through on the helpline or are calling after hours;
- Be there for help-seekers who prefer not to speak on the phone;
- Give Helpline callers a follow-on destination after the 20-30 min call;
- Get involved in a platform where meaningful connections can be established;
- Be a part of ongoing dialogue with others who have a shared experience;
- Support community members to help others and in turn help themselves

Help-seeker engagement on the forums

- **Third most visited page** on the Griefline website (after the homepage and resource hub)
- 2,000+ subscribers
- Thousands of posts
- Most popular forum theme - Grief and Loss
- Most engaged with topic - Loss of a Loved One
- Other popular topics - Personal Relationships and Loss of a Pet

24/7 online forums

Griefline's moderated online forums create a safe space to share stories and resources while reflecting on one's own coping style and strategies. Linking people to get through tough times together.

Help-seekers will benefit in multiple ways by posting on the forums:

1. Get support from people who truly understand – people with a shared experience come closest to understanding what they're going through.
2. Posting can help in grief recovery – expressing oneself in writing helps crystallise thoughts and feelings, to start making sense of it all.
3. Helping others helps oneself– by telling one's story or responding to other's experience they are benefiting others which makes them feel validated and connected, gaining a sense of purpose

24/7 online forums cont'd

Current forums include:

- Grief and Loss
- Loneliness and Isolation
- Stressful or Traumatic Events

Encourage callers who need more support to visit the forums and participate particularly between the hours of midnight and 6am. Visit: <https://griefline.org.au/forums/>

Online forums 'Volunpeer' program

Every week Griefline volunteers offer compassion, understanding and support to hundreds of Australians on the Helpline, however there are times when the phone lines are quiet.

The Forums give us an opportunity to funnel this wonderful human resource online. Here volunteers can continue to provide their compassion, knowledge & expertise to forums users.

The Volunpeer program has been created to generate a responsive, attentive and supportive forums platform boasting a diverse range of voices, lived experience and perspectives.

The overall goal is to create a volunteer-led, mostly self-sufficient environment that represents the best of its type in the grief and loss space in Australia.

Online forums: 'Volunpeer' program

5 key principles

- 1. Responsiveness:** establish and maintain a highly responsive online environment
- 2. Equality:** The forums are first and foremost a peer-to-peer space. All participants are considered to be on equal terms regardless of Volunpeer (VP) or Community Member (CM) status.
- 3. Congruence:** VP's respond directly to each CM's unique presentation and experience
- 4. Confidentiality:** all VPs should use best endeavours to remain anonymous, keep their stories de-identified and never engage with CM's known to them
- 5. Accountability:** VP engagement is regularly monitored and, where necessary, feedback and appropriate support is provided. Supervision is provided where required.

Online forums: 'Volunpeer' participation

- Griefline Helpline volunteers log on to the forums at the start of each Helpline shift.
- During downtimes on the Helpline, Volunpeers are encouraged to engage with forums community members by posting according to the 3-part engagement process or by igniting new conversations.
- Volunpeers position themselves as 'peers' rather than counsellors
- You will need to register to become a member of the forums. Follow the instructions in the Volunteer checklist to register before you attend the role play workshop

Online forums: Our 3-part protocol for engaging new members

The 3-part forums engagement process consists of:

- 1 First response**
post to Witness their grief, Reward their courage and Empower them
- 2 Validation**
post to validate their grief and loss experience, build trust, motivate to engage
- 3 Strengthen**
post to promote robust engagement, cement faith in the online community and provide compassionate and understanding support

The 'Ignite Conversation' posts start a new topic either based on personal experience or a subject that is highly topical to the forums community.

Online forums: 3-part protocol to engage new members

Part 1 - first response

Griefline's first engagement with a new Community Member is sometimes our last, so providing informative content & self-care tools is important.

Purpose of First Response Post:

- **Witness their grief**, ensuring they feel welcomed & understood
- **Reward their courage** to post through responsive acknowledgement
- **Empower them** with knowledge & coping skills

Online forums: 3-part protocol to engage new members

Part 1 – first response: approach and techniques

Acknowledgement of their unique grief experience:

- Reflect on the content & emotions expressed in their post
- Display empathy eg. “What happened to you matters. I see your loss and your devastation”
- Withhold judgement

Psychoeducation: information on types of loss & grief, biopsychosocial responses e.g.: somatic symptoms & societal responses

Online forums: 3-part protocol to engage new members

Part 1 – first response: approach and techniques cont'd

Self-awareness: highlight & reinforce strengths that are evident

Coping strategies: include 1-2 links to relevant content from the [Griefline Resource Hub](#)

Support Network: reinforce the benefits of social support including the forums, look for evidence of IRL support, & provide reassurance eg. “you are not alone” / “we are here for you”.

Online forums: 3-part protocol to engage new members

Part 2 – Validation

A second Volunteer then follows up with a more personalised response to the CM (which can also refer to the First Response)

Purpose of Validation post:

- **Validate** the CM's grief and loss experience
- **Help build their trust** in the online social network
- **Motivate them to engage** in reciprocal exchanges

Online forums: 3-part protocol to engage new members

Part 2 – Validation: approaches and techniques

- **Normalise their experience** by contributing your shared experiences, unique insights and understanding. *Note – any resource links must be sourced from approved Griefline providers. Please do not include links to the Griefline Resource Hub
- **Establish a supportive and equal environment** through self-disclosure (only where appropriate and where you feel comfortable to do so).
- **Use open-ended questions** to encourage 2-way dialogue
- **Reinforce** their growing online support network.

Online forums: 3-part protocol to engage new members

Part 3 – Strengthen

A third Volunteer follows up with the final response to the CM (generally a shorter response).

Purpose of Strengthen Post:

- **Create robust engagement** and dynamic interplay between users
- **Cement their faith** in the online community
- **Provide compassionate** and understanding support with tailored coping strategies

Online forums: 3-part protocol to engage new members

Part 3 – Strengthen: approach and techniques

- **Ignite conversation** and broaden understanding by offering new or divergent personal insights
- **Link together** CMs who share similar experiences by referencing their posts in your reply to promote supportive, ongoing dialogue
- **Provide practical advice** for your preferred self-care and coping tools*

*Please link to Griefline resources first and foremost. For more information refer to slides 22 and 23

Online forums: 3-part protocol to engage existing members

When to implement when all new community members have been welcomed through the 3-part engagement

Aim: To bring our forums to life by regularly updating and adding interesting insights, experiences and content

How: Start a new topic either based on your personal experience or a subject that is highly topical to the forums community. Suggested Inclusions:

- Practice 'writing as healing'. Share your experience relating to grief and loss
- Self-disclosure is welcomed in this instance - provided you and anyone else is de-identified
- News/social media stories e.g.: significant days of the year, anniversaries or themes and topics from our GL social media

Online forums: tone of voice and approach

- Strive to position yourself as a 'peer' rather than a counsellor in all your Forums engagements (with the exception of the First Response which takes a psycho-educational approach).
- If you are replying to a CM as part of the 3-part engagement process, please be mindful of any power-imbalances that may be perceived by the Community Member... A triple dose of 'counselling-style' feedback might be interpreted by some as patronising or overly-directive in a peer-to-peer space.
- Whilst there is no minimum or maximum word count, First Responses and Ignite Conversations generally run 2-4 paragraphs.
- The Validate and Strengthen responses should be kept a little shorter. However, we suggest a minimum of 2-3 sentences.

Online forums: response rate targets

- Our goal is for CM posts to receive a VP response;
 - within 24 hours on weekdays (stretch goal = 3 hours)
 - within 36 hours on weekends (stretch goal = 3 hours)
- Peer to peer dialogue is highly prized & promoted on the Griefline forums. So, while Volunpeer engagement is appreciated, it is only required in the absence of other forum user's entering the discussion.
- Once a CM's post has received all 3 VP replies, the prescribed VP engagement is complete. However, feel free to continue to engage with the thread at your discretion.
- The forums are moderated by the Volunteer Support Team on a regular basis

Online forums: referrals and links

Guidelines for use

Links to Griefline Resources

- All First Response Posts should include links to content housed on the Griefline Resource Hub.
- Please take the time to familiarise yourself with our diverse range of content. Resources include highly informative articles, an e-book, fact sheets, explainer videos, step by step guides to coping strategies, and self-care tools.
- The Resource Hub can be accessed here; <https://griefline.org.au/resources/>
- We suggest 1 to 2 links per First Response post.
- However, links to the Griefline Resource Hub should NOT be included in other Volunteer replies or posts as these should be approached from a peer perspective.

Online forums: external links

Guidelines for use

External Links

- For 'Validate', 'Strengthen' and 'Ignite Conversation' posts you can include links to video, audio or written content that has been created by any of the following;
 - Official Griefline Partners
 - Government organisations listed in the Griefline Helpline referral list;
- Please refrain from linking to any content that is not Griefline approved. Instead, send your recommendations through to the Volunteer Support Team for appraisal.

Hang on, I have a question...

- Jot down any questions and bring them to the Practicing Conversations workshop
- Please email the Volunteer Support Team
- Our motto is always - Be Present, Not Perfect
- Remember there is no such thing as a stupid question, we are all learning and the smart option is to ask so you can feel confident and ready to help

OUR ONLINE PRESENCE

Please click the icon to follow, like and engage.

