

# Journey through Sadness To Healing



A guide for Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander People



**Artwork**  
**“The Natural Flow of Life”**

**Artist: Bianca Warner**

Bianca is an Aboriginal woman living in Georges River area. She is a busy working wife and mum, sister and friend.

Bianca said “I love this artwork, I never really thought it was finished but

now I realise that as we move through life and the mind quiets and settles the external noises do not affect us anymore. We learn to settle in our story, regardless of what our story is.”

The art shows a river flowing naturally through the earth, giving life to all that need it.

The winding bends shows the movement of life for all, impacting our story. Life does not stand still, we do not either.

We love, grow, learn and age throughout life.

Our footprint and story will be forever ingrained in the salts of the earth.

Our story will not be forgotten

This publication was adapted from the St George Hospital Bereavement Booklet and developed by:  
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SESLHD acknowledges the work of Palliative Care Australia in promoting shared decision making for Aboriginal people and their families. SESLHD acknowledges that information contained within this resources are either sourced from or adapted directly from the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Discussion Starter – Working on What’s Right for You*.

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Art and elements used within this design of this booklet are in part and full extracts from “The Natural Flow of Life”, Bianca Warner with permission



## Acknowledgment of Country

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians on whose lands our facilities are located; the lands of the Dharawal, Gadigal, Wangal, Gweagal and Bidjigal peoples.

We would like to pay our respects to the Elders past, present and those of the future. We also acknowledge Aboriginal peoples' connection to country, culture and heritage.

South Eastern Boundaries' is based on the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District boundary map and replicates the locations of the facilities from Sydney's Central Business District in the north to the Royal National Park in the south



The Meeting Places (circles within circles) represent The Sutherland Hospital, St George Hospital, Prince of Wales and Royal Hospital for Women, Sydney and Sydney Eye Hospital, Calvary Health Care and War Memorial Hospital



The lines with dots represent the patient's journey from their homes, to and from the facilities where people access our healthcare services



The other symbols are the local Aboriginal Community Elders, Men, Women and Children who call the South Eastern Sydney area their country and home



The dark and light blue circles are the strong currents and waves which surround the beautiful coast line of the east coast



The assortment of coloured dot patterns are of the surrounding Aboriginal Nations which surround and connect all Aboriginal Nations and our people to each other in respect and harmony

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District acknowledges that preparing for and going through Sorry Business is a sad time. We have put this booklet together to help you.

You may find this booklet helpful if you:

- Are preparing to pass
- Are preparing for the passing of a loved one
- Have a loved one who has recently passed

This booklet has information about what happens, where you can find help, and things that you might need to do when you are preparing to pass or grieving the loss of a loved one.

It is important to remember that everyone experiences grief in unique and different ways. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief can be unpredictable. You may experience emotions that you haven't felt before. You may feel sad, angry or overwhelmed. In living with grief, you will find what helps you through it and what doesn't help.

The phone numbers in this booklet are for services that can help you with Sorry Business and grieving. Please ask to speak to the Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer or a social worker if you would like any more information or help.

We understand that the information in this booklet might make you feel sad, angry, worried or other emotions that are difficult to understand. If you or someone you know are having trouble with your emotions please speak to the Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer, a social worker or reach out to one of the support services listed on Page 8.

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# Sadness

You might hear people talk about bereavement. This is a word used to explain the time when you find out you or someone you care about is very sick and preparing to pass, through to passing and Sorry Business.

As Aboriginal people, we experience times of sadness differently to others. There are sometimes extra cultural responsibilities, caring duties, and unexpected travel. We also share our experiences of sadness with our family and community, and we often start to grieve very early in times of sadness.

## What is grief?

Grief is all the different types of emotions you feel when you are preparing for, or have experienced a loss.

Some different ways you may feel when grieving include:



Sad



Lonely



Angry



Scared



Tired



Anxious



Relieved



Happy

Grief is different for everyone. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. There is no time limit to grief. Feelings of sadness change over time. Older grief is sometimes more gentle on your heart. Special times like birthdays or anniversaries are sometimes harder. It is ok to have happy days and sad days while grieving.

Ask a social worker or bereavement worker if you have worries about your grief.

## What might help?

Being involved with caring for each other

Take some time for you – it is ok to need some time and space

Keep a diary of how you are feeling and what you are thinking

Being involved with caring for each other

Staying connected to your family, friends and community

Don't pretend – the way you feel is real and only you know how hurt your heart is

Be creative – draw, paint, write a poem about your relationship with your loved one

Avoid using alcohol and drugs

# Help with grieving

There are many different reasons you might need help with grief.

This may be the first time you have felt loss. You may have had an experience with loss that you struggled with. Whatever the reason, it is ok to need help to grieve.

Some feelings you may have that you need help dealing with include:

- Guilt about what you did or what you feel you could have done better
- Relief that your loved one is no longer suffering
- Deep sadness - sometimes depression
- Worries or anxiety about life without your loved one
- Strong feelings of anger or rage
- Changes in your behaviour - for example eating less or more, not sleeping the same
- Extreme feelings of self-harm or suicide

Feeling some or all these things during grief can be normal. But if you are feeling like this for a long time, it can be helpful to speak to someone.

If you or someone you know are feeling like this please contact any of the following for support:




If you or someone you know are having extreme thoughts of suicide or self-harm, please call 000 immediately.



# Comforting Care

What happens when someone is passing?

Changes in the body and mind are normal when someone is passing. Each person's experience is different, and changes don't happen in any right or wrong order. Some changes include:



When I breathe my throat makes noises, but it does not hurt

I feel so tired, please yarn to me when I am awake

My hands and feet feel cold

Blood is circulating in my body slower. This makes changes in my body

**If you are worried about your loved one when these changes start, please speak to a nurse, Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer, social worker or doctor.**

# Caring Conversations

Feeling comfort during times of sadness is important for everyone. The person who is passing needs to feel loved and supported. And so do the people who are grieving.

We must remember that everyone’s journey through sadness to healing, is different. There is no one place that everyone starts and finishes. Even people who are preparing to pass grieve. They grieve for what they will not share with the people left behind. They grieve for the life they thought they would have. They grieve for the things they wanted to do but couldn’t.

This resource from Palliative Care Australia is useful for everyone during this sad time. It can help the person who is preparing to pass tell the story of how they feel and how they want to be cared for. It can also help yarn about how others are feeling and what support they need when preparing for the loss of a loved one.



If you would like a copy of this resource, please speak to a nurse, Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer or doctor.

As part of these yarns, you might start to think about what will happen after you pass, information about the type of funeral you would like, and who will make decisions for you if you are unable to. You might hear terms used including “Will, Power of Attorney, Guardian and Advanced Care Directive”. These can be referred to as Planning Ahead documents and might sound scary, but they are important steps to making sure you are cared for, and your wishes followed. Having these things in order when you can still make decisions can help your loved ones grieve easier.

**Capacity**

It is important to make these decisions and sign these Planning Ahead documents when you still have capacity. This means you:

- Understand information needed to make important decisions
- Understand the next steps after you decide
- Are able to explain your decisions to others. This includes your doctor, family, partner and friends

**Wills**

A Will is a legal document that tells your family, friends and legal professionals what you want to happen with things that are important to you after you pass.

Things you can put in your will include:

- Houses
- Jewellery
- Mobile phones
- Money
- Cars, Boats, Motorcycles
- Photos
- Computers
- Pets

Wills can also include your wishes for children under the age of 18 years. This may include:

- Who they live with
- The area they live in
- What school they go to
- Activities they participate in

Wills are also one way that you can pass on Cultural Knowledge.

### **Power of Attorney**

Giving someone Power of Attorney means that they are able to look after your bills and money if you can't. There are strict rules and guidelines for people who are given Power of Attorney to follow.

Putting this in place means that, if you are sick or can't manage your money by yourself, your Power of Attorney can use your money to:

- Pay bills –like telephone, internet, credit card
- Look after your home –pay rent or mortgage, pay for repairs
- Use your money to buy you the things you need –like food and clothes
- Ensure your money is available to pay for you care need

### **Advanced Care Directive**

An Advanced Care Directive is the opportunity for you to write down what is important to you about the care you receive. This can be done in a letter or by filling out a form with your health care professionals.

It is important to speak to your family, partner, children, friends and doctor about what is important to you about your care. This can include your values, the type of care you do and don't want, and any worries you have.

An Advanced Care Directive acts as a guide for your loved ones, to help them make decisions for you if you can no longer make them for yourself. It is very personal to you and must be followed by your family and doctors, as well as your Enduring Guardian, if you have one.

### **Enduring Guardian**

An Enduring Guardian is someone who you ask to make decisions about your health and wellbeing needs if you can't make them.

This includes:

- Where you live
- Discussion with doctors about treatment and medication
- Dental care
- Options for care including care in your home or a care facility

## Sorry Business

### **Yarning about Sorry Business with children**

Yarning to your child about Sorry Business is hard when you are on the same journey. Speaking in an open and honest way can help your child understand what is going on. This is a time of acknowledging the spirit is moving on. Depending on your cultural practice, you may tell your dreaming story or take part in cultural or religious ceremonies.



Your children need you to be honest with them, understand grief is different for everyone. Some children can handle death well. They may be more hurt or frightened if we excluded them from the news or hide your own grief. It is okay to cry with your child. This can help them feel safe to do the same.

### **Toddlers and pre-schoolers**

These children understand death as a move to another place. They don't understand that the person is gone forever. Your child might ask whether they can visit the person who died and when the person is coming back. They might ask the same questions over and over. This is their way of trying to understand what has happened. Some of your child's old habits might return – for example, they might wet the bed or start waking up through the night.

### **Young children (6-10 years)**

At this age, children understand that death is the end of life. They also might believe that death can be prevented or that not everyone will die. They may deny the death has occurred, blame other people, or feel guilty for not “being good” to the dead person. You can help your school-age child by:

- Let them know that the death wasn't their fault
- Let them see you are grieving too
- Be honest when answering questions – for example, if your child asks whether you'll die, you could say, 'Yes, I'll die one day'
- Explain that everyone dies, but it usually happens when people are old or very sick
- Suggest doing a memorial activity. For example, walking on country, connecting to a special place

### **Children 11 years and over**

These young adults will have find it hard to understand and handle their emotions. They may bottle their feelings up inside. Sharing our grief will help them to share their emotions too.

Involve the young person in decisions or ask for ideas if they chose to share.

It is also a good idea to speak to the people outside your family who support your child. This may include:

- Teachers
- Close friends and their families
- Sports coaches and teammates
- Work colleagues

There are resources to help you support your child or young person during this difficult time. Please speak to a social worker or the Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer if you or your child need extra help.

### **Things you might need to do**

On the next page is a list of organisations and service providers that you may need to contact after your loved one has passed. There may be other organisations you need to or would like to contact. This list is to help get you started with this difficult task.

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Notified of Death (Y/N)</b>	<b>Contact Number</b>
Australian Electoral Commission		132 326
Australian Taxation Office		132 861
Banks		
Centrelink Indigenous Call Centre		1800 136 380
Credit Card		
Department of Veterans Affairs		1800 838 372
Employers		
Real Estate Agent		
Executor of the Will/Solicitor		
Family and friends		
Funeral director		
Health Fund		
Housing Contact Centre		1800422322
Insurance companies		
Medicare		132 011
My Aged Care		1800 200 422
Professionals such accountant		
Phone and Internet company		
Utilities such as gas, electricity companies		
Vehicle registration and licensing authorities		



## Arranging a funeral

Making arrangements for your own or a loved ones funeral can be hard. You might also find yourself smiling as you remember stories of happy times. Feeling both ways is ok and normal.

As part of your Caring Conversations, you may have found your loved one has a pre-paid funeral, or discussed the type of funeral they would like. This may have included:

- The preferred funeral home
- Music
- Flowers
- Location

There are many different funeral homes that you can use and all provide a unique and personalised service.

### **Sorry Business and places to go to for help**

Sorry Business is not only difficult emotionally, but it can be a hard time financially too. Funerals are expensive, there's often unexpected travel, and sometimes you can have extra visitors that you didn't plan for.

If you need financial support during Sorry Business, there is help available. You can call:

- NSW Aboriginal Land Council
- NSW Aboriginal Affairs
- Transport NSW
- Centrelink
- Department of Veterans Affairs

## People and Places to find help and support on your journey through sadness to healing

There are many people, places and organisations that can give you and your loved ones different types of help and support during sad times. Below is a list of some of these supports.

<p><b>Aboriginal Legal Service</b></p> <p>Provides general information about solicitors who do free or low cost wills in your local area.</p>	<p><b>Ph:</b> 1800 765 767 (02) 8303 6600</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://alsnswact.org.au">alsnswact.org.au</a></p>
<p><b>Beyond Blue</b></p> <p>Provides 24/7 mental health support for everyone.</p>	<p><b>Ph:</b> 1300 224 636</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://beyondblue.org.au">beyondblue.org.au</a></p>
<p><b>Centrelink (Indigenous Call Centre)</b></p> <p>Provides financial support to carers of loved ones who have passed.</p>	<p><b>Ph:</b> 1800 136 380</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://servicesaustralia.gov.au">servicesaustralia.gov.au</a></p>
<p><b>Department of Veterans Affairs</b></p> <p>Can provide financial assistance to the families of people who have served in the Australia Defence Force.</p>	<p><b>Ph:</b> 1800 838 372</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.dva.gov.au">www.dva.gov.au</a></p>
<p><b>Kids Helpline</b></p> <p>Provides 24/7 mental health support for children and young people aged between 5 years and 25 years. Parents and carers can also call and yarn about worries about younger people.</p>	<p><b>Ph:</b> 1800 551 800</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://kidshelpline.com.au">kidshelpline.com.au</a></p>

<p><b>Law Access NSW and Legal Aid NSW</b></p> <p>Provides information about Planning Ahead documents. They can also provide information about places that help prepare these documents. (Pages 10-13)</p>	<p><b>Ph:</b> 1300 888 529</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://lawaccess.nsw.gov.au">lawaccess.nsw.gov.au</a> <a href="http://legalaid.nsw.gov.au">legalaid.nsw.gov.au</a></p>
<p><b>Lifeline Australia</b></p> <p>Provides 24/7 mental health and crisis support to everyone.</p>	<p><b>Ph:</b> 13 11 14</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://lifeline.org.au">lifeline.org.au</a></p>
<p><b>NSW Public Guardian</b></p> <p>Provides information and education about Enduring Guardianship (Page 13)</p>	<p><b>Ph:</b> 1800 451 510</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://publicguardian.justice.nsw.gov.au">publicguardian.justice.nsw.gov.au</a></p>
<p><b>NSW Trustee and Guardian</b></p> <p>Wills and Power of Attorney is a government agency that can help prepare and update your planning ahead documents (Pages 11-12)</p>	<p><b>Ph:</b> 1300 554 791</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://tag.nsw.gov.au">tag.nsw.gov.au</a></p>
<p><b>Planning Ahead Tools Website</b></p> <p>Provides simple information and guides to understanding and preparing your Planning Ahead documents (Page 10)</p>	<p><b>Ph:</b> 1300 554 791</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://planningaheadtools.com.au">planningaheadtools.com.au</a></p>





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