

[Home](#) > [Newspaper](#) > [Opinions](#) > Karl Vella Foundation: here to care

Karl Vella Foundation: here to care

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Karl Vella Foundation (KVF), is an NGO which supports children between the ages of 5 and 17 who are going through the illness or loss of a family member. These situations affect children differently, open how they experience and process these situations is specific to the child.



Research shows that aspects of a family member's illness that affects the child the most are related to the treatment. This includes witnessing their loved one go through the side-effects of chemotherapy, and having their loved one under surgery. Children also tend to struggle when their loved one needs to spend time in hospital.

With regards to loss, the process of grief is experienced by everyone, no matter their age. Loss brings with it many shifts in the family, mainly to try to fill in the gaps left by the deceased family member. When children lose a caregiver, concerns about security and care arise, as they might worry that their other caregivers will also pass away, leaving them alone. When losing a sibling, children might experience "survivor's guilt", essentially feeling guilty that they are alive and their sibling is not.

There are many theories which explain the stages one goes through when experiencing grief or other difficult situations. The child may experience shock and denial about the situation, and their feelings might be numbed. After a while they might feel that the situation is unbearable, along with feelings of guilt. Anger is a very common experience within this process, wherein children might lash out and be more impulsive. Feelings of sadness, isolation and loneliness are also common. After some time there might be an upward turn and the child's intense emotions settle down. The child begins to move forward and could then reach a state where they accept the situation and find ways to live with what is going on. It is important to note that these phases are not linear, and that a child might remain in a stage for months, or skip stages entirely. Everyone is different, and the way one processes situations is very specific to the person.

When going through these types of experiences, it is important that the child is supported in processing what is going on as this helps alleviate some of the distressing symptoms they might be experiencing. This in turn helps the child function better at school, home and in other social settings.

open Karl Vella Foundation provides a variety of support to children and their families. KVF's The Loss Bed offers psycho-educational group sessions for children, which are grouped according to age.

of a community in which they can feel understood and feel that they are not alone in the experience they are going through. All sessions are facilitated by a mental health professional to ensure that all the thoughts and feelings expressed can then be processed and contained. KVF also provides one-to-one therapy to children going through the experiences mentioned above. The forms of therapy provided include art therapy, drama therapy, play therapy and talk therapy.

As of recently KVF, in conjunction with the MCCF and the Franciscan Conventuals, have launched a project called Life Beyond Loss. These are bereavement groups, for those who have lost a child, and bereavement groups for those who have lost a partner. The sessions are facilitated by a mental health professional and are therapeutic groups.

KVF has also launched its Because You Matter... Because We Care service, which is providing support to patients and their carers receiving treatment abroad. This support is in the form of crisis interventions, check-ins and psychological support.

If you are a patient or carer receiving treatment abroad and would like to make use of our service please call us on 7704 1569 or send an email to becauseyoumatter@kvf.org.mt. All KVF services are free of charge.

For more information about the Karl Vella Foundation visit <https://karlvellafoundation.org/> or send an email on: info@karlvellafoundation.org

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Martina Chircop is a psycho-educator at the Karl Vella Foundation

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