

Grief

A guide to the healing process

Coping with life after the death of someone close to you can be very hard. In this leaflet we explain some of the feelings you may have and suggest ways of dealing with them over the next few months.

Grief

Grief is a normal response to loss. It often brings physical and emotional pain. Shock, anger, guilt, regret, numbness and loneliness are some emotions that most people feel.

Unfortunately, there is no magic wand to take away the pain. Grief is something you have to work through. There is no set time to say when you will feel better. Sometimes you might find that you take two steps forwards and then three steps backwards.

First reactions

If you have been expecting someone close to you to die, at first you may feel numb. This is nature's way of helping you realise and accept the death.

If the death is sudden and unexpected, your reaction may be disbelief. It may take time to understand what has happened and you may feel a great deal of pain because you have not had the chance to say goodbye.

You may find yourself expecting your loved one to suddenly arrive and hear familiar sounds like their key in the door, or feel their presence in the room. Accept these things as part of the process of grieving, which will eventually lead you through this terrible time.

The physical signs of grief

Some people are affected physically by the death of their loved one. Some people can't sit still and become hyperactive. Others have headaches, shortness of breath, chest pains, dizziness, lack of concentration or depression. Some find it difficult to sleep and some experience bad dreams.

But don't be alarmed – it's unlikely that you will suffer any of these symptoms. It is just important to realise that an emotional shock can produce physical symptoms. You should speak to your doctor if you have any symptoms over a period of time.

Emotions

Do not be afraid of crying or showing emotion. Tears relieve emotional stress and there is nothing to be ashamed of. Most people have times when they feel angry – angry that they have been left or that the doctor did not prevent the death, or angry that the life was not fulfilled and that there are plans left unfinished.

You might also feel guilt. 'If only...' is a very common feeling and is natural after a death. Talking about these feelings with a close friend or member of the family may help you.

The way forward

Many people choose to withdraw from social contact, feeling unable to face the outside world. You may feel like this, but grieving is difficult enough without having to do it all on your own.

Allow yourself time to grieve and adjust to your new situation. Always take time before making any major decisions such as moving house.

The most important healing can come from talking. It may help to go over what happened many times with family and friends. Talking about your feelings may also help. A professional counsellor or people like the Samaritans will have the time and understanding to talk to you. You will never get over it, but in time you will come to terms with what has happened.

Try to recognise the danger signs of becoming too dependent on tranquillisers or alcohol. You may find keeping a diary or writing down your thoughts helpful, and you never need to show your writing to anyone.

Helpful organisations

Cruse Bereavement Care (England and Wales)

Cruse can help anyone who has lost someone they love.

Call: 0844 477 9400

Young persons helpline: 0808 808 1677

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

helpline@cruse.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care, PO Box 800,
Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1RG

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

Call: 0845 600 2227

www.crusescotland.org.uk

info@crusescotland.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland, Riverview
House, Friarton Road, Perth PH2 8DF

Samaritans

Samaritans offer a 24-hour phone listening service.

Call: 116 123

www.samaritans.org

jo@samaritans.org

Citizens Advice

This is a good source of practical help and advice and is particularly helpful with financial or legal problems. To find your nearest bureau visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends

They offer help for parents whose children have died.

Call: 0345 123 2304

www.tcf.org.uk

helpline@tcf.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends, 53 North Street, Bristol BS3 1EN

The Child Death Helpline

Call: 0800 282 986 (Mon to Fri 10am to 1pm, Tues and Wed 1pm to 4pm and every evening 7pm to 10pm).

www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk