

Advice on bereavement

IT'S OK TO EXPRESS GRIEF

As a society we're not very good at accepting expressions of grief. People may tell you not to upset yourself. But it is far more healthy to express what you feel (e.g. through weeping) than to bottle up your emotions. It's true that a small minority of people go to excess in expressing grief but most bereaved people don't.

People may expect you to be over your deep sense of grief quite quickly. But grief can last many months.

It's OK (within reason) if you wish:

- to speak to anyone who will listen about your loved one.
- to visit places you used to go to with your loved one.
- to tell anyone who will listen if you feel depressed
- to have photos or mementoes of your loved one on show

THE POSSIBLE STAGES OF GRIEF

Coming to terms with bereavement is a lengthy process and often includes various stages. *These stages do not happen in a neat and orderly fashion. You may not experience some of them at all.* More than one may happen at the same time. Or you may switch backwards and forwards between them. If you don't understand this is normal it can be quite confusing and frightening. If you experience them, it is quite normal.

There can be various physical signs of bereavement, e.g. migraine headaches, stomach pains, sweaty palms, feeling you're "falling apart/coming unstuck". At times there may be tightness in the throat or a choking feeling or a need to sigh. Your sleep pattern may alter. You may lose your appetite. You might find you are unable to sit still or concentrate.

You may feel exhausted simply coping. Or you may be fearful about things which never worried you in the past..

The following stages can take place in coming to terms with bereavement:

1. **DENIAL:** You can't believe your loved one has died. You keep thinking you will see them or hear from them and that they're not really dead. Everything seems unreal and remote. You feel lonely and numb. The funeral, although painful, may help to make the death real. This needs to happen before you can start to come to terms with bereavement.
2. **ANGER:** You may find you are angry with God, with the doctors, with the hospital or other people. You might even be angry with your deceased loved one. This happens even to people who have been happily married. Tell God about your anger, including if you feel angry towards him. Tell a trusted friend who is prepared to listen.
3. **BARGAINING:** For example, making promises to God in order to try to avoid the pain of grief
4. **DEPRESSION:** You reflect on what could have been. Everything might seem pointless and hopeless. You feel apathetic. Life is empty. You may feel irrationally guilty and exaggerate memories of ways you think you failed your loved one. Sometimes you will feel others are avoiding you or don't want to talk about your bereavement. You may even lose the will to live. Talk to a trusted friend who is prepared to listen. Talk to God about it.
5. **ACCEPTANCE:** You will eventually reach the point where you are able to "let go" of deceased: to commit them to God. At this stage you can begin to live your own life however different it is from

life as it was or would have been with your loved one. You make the choices not your deceased loved one.

All these reactions are normal at the time, but they will pass and you will find yourself gradually beginning a new chapter of life.

Fear may also be a problem: fear of loneliness; fear of not being able to cope with practical jobs, finances, moving house; fear of death. See below for the help which is readily available from various agencies.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

Look after yourself

- Try to eat nourishing meals in spite of any lack of appetite
- Try to rest even if you find it difficult to sleep (a hot bath and milk drink could help)
- Try to look after your appearance
- Try to get some fresh air and exercise
- Contact your doctor if you're concerned about your health
- You're allowed to spoil yourself a little!

Avoid hasty decisions

- Try not to allow people to rush you into decisions until you're ready (e.g. parting with your loved one's belongings)
- Try not to move house whilst you're still in a state of grief
- Try to take each day as it comes – one at a time
- Try to deal with problems which arise rather than leave them until a later time
- Don't make any financial agreement you don't understand

Maintain your relationships

- Write to friends and relatives
- Arrange to visit friends, maybe staying overnight
- Invite friends for coffee or tea
- Look for people you can help, e.g. lonely or bereaved people.
- Perhaps you could baby-sit for a young couple

- You're very welcome to join the church which is a friendly family and has informal groups you could be involved in.
- Then there are adult education classes and other local groups.
- On a different level, a pet can be a good companion.

Plan things you can look forward to

- In addition to some of the things mentioned in the previous section you could:
- Try to ensure you always plan some pleasant event during the next month
- Think about planning a holiday

HELP IS AVAILABLE

Help in Coping with Bereavement

Remember God is always with you. You can pray to him 24 hours a day.

Help Organisations

Cruse Bereavement Care, PO Box 800, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 2RG. 020 8939 9530. info@cruse.org.uk
Helpline 0844 477 9400 www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk. General help, advice, counselling

The Compassionate Friends, 53 North Street, Bristol BS3 1EN. 0845 120 3785 Helpline: 0845 1 23 23 04
helpline@tcf.org.uk available for support and information daily from 10.00 - 16.00 and 19.00 - 22.00
The line is always answered by a bereaved parent. Self-help organisation of parents whose child of any age, including adult, has died.

Samaritans 08457 90 90 90 jo@samaritans.org

Age Concern, FREEPOST (SWB 30375), Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7ZZ. Free helpline 0800 00 99 66
www.ageconcern.org.uk. Practical help is available for the over 60s, also advice on insurance.

National Association of Widows/Widows Advisory Trust, 48 Queens Road, Coventry CV1 3EH 024 7663
4848 (answerphone at times) www.widows.uk.net. Support, information, advice

Help the Aged, St James's Walk, London EC1R 0BE. *SeniorLine*, a free national information service for senior citizens, their relatives, carers and friends. 0800 650065

SANDS (Stillbirth & Neonatal Death Society), 28 Portland Place, London, W1B 1LY. Sands Head Office: 020 7436 7940 Sands National Helpline: 020 7436 5881 helpline@uk-sands.org

The Miscarriage Association, c/o Clayton Hospital, Northgate, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF1 3JS
Helpline: 01924 200799 (Mon-Fri, 9am - 4pm) Admin: 01924 200795 (Mon-Fri, 9am - 4pm). www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk.

FSID Foundation for the Study of Infant Death 11 Belgrave Road, London SW1V 1RB, Tel (Enquiries): 020 7802 3200 Tel (Helpline): 020 7233 2090. Web: www.fsid.org.uk Support, information and advice for those bereaved through a cot death.

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