

Coping with loss

You're probably reading this because someone close to you has recently died. For most of us, bereavement is the most distressing experience we will ever have to face. Grief is what we feel when somebody we are close to dies. Everyone experiences grief differently and there is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve. Many people go through a range of emotions. Sometimes people are shocked and upset by the emotions they experience, and realising that these emotions are quite normal may help.

Your feelings

At first you may be too shocked to feel anything. You may feel only numbness and disbelief. As you get over the shock, you may have many powerful feelings such as guilt, anger and fear. Sometimes you may feel that you are coping and, at other times, you may feel overwhelmed by sadness, loneliness and despair. These feelings are not unnatural or wrong. They are all "normal" reactions to what may be the most difficult experience of your life.

Your thoughts

Many bereaved people find it hard to concentrate and feel confused and forgetful. You may feel overwhelmed and find it difficult to carry out even everyday tasks. Your thoughts may constantly

return to the person who has died and painful questions and fears may run through your mind. Some people find that it helps to throw themselves into work. Others find they need to take time off from day-to-day life and activities. Everyone needs to find their own way of coping.

Taking care of yourself

Physical reactions to bereavement are very common. It's important to take care of yourself when you have lost someone close to you. You may be having difficulty sleeping and have vivid dreams. You may lose your appetite. Some people feel tense, breathless, edgy and restless; others feel slow and lethargic. You will probably feel exhausted. Strong emotions and all the things that need to be done after someone has died can leave you feeling tired and drained. The stress of grief may make you more susceptible to colds and other infections. Take extra care of yourself. Eat properly and try to get some rest, even if you can't sleep. Try to take some gentle exercise. Give yourself time and permission to grieve. Be kind to yourself – don't try to do too much and do seek help and support if you feel you need it.

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Difficult times and feelings

Feelings of depression and meaningless can hit you when the shock and disbelief have receded. Just when you think you've started to feel better, you may hit rock bottom and feel that life is empty and bleak. It may be helpful to talk about your feelings of hopelessness and despair with someone experienced in bereavement counselling.

Sadness is a natural response to bereavement but if you do become depressed you should see your doctor for help and advice. Your GP is there to help-you don't have to cope on your own.

You may feel angry after bereavement and this can be one of the hardest feelings to cope with. Anger is a completely normal part of grief. It's a perfectly understandable response to feeling out of control, powerless and abandoned. Don't bottle up your feelings- talking about them with someone who isn't emotionally involved in your loss can help.

Your familiar world has been turned upside down and you may feel fearful and anxious. This is a very natural response to bereavement. You're likely to feel that you have little control over your life and feel vulnerable and afraid. But as you get used to coping you will become more confident.

There is no time limit on grief and all these emotions are normal responses which you may experience. However, if you feel that you are

really overwhelmed and not coping with life then it may be time to seek help and support.

Helping other people

If you're supporting someone else following a bereavement, these are some suggestions that may help you and them.

People who have been bereaved usually want to talk about the person they have lost. One of the most helpful things you can do is simply listen and encourage them to talk; give them time and space to grieve. Offering specific practical help can also be very helpful; for example, shopping, preparing meals, tidying the house.

Looking to the future

Life will never be the same again after you've lost someone you love. You may feel that your life doesn't have much meaning, or that you've nothing left to offer. Looking back at your life and taking stock of your contribution to the world can help you realize that bereavement doesn't take that away. Think of the people you care about and who care about you.

It's also important to look forward, however difficult this may be. Make the most of every opportunity to spend time with other people, keep in touch with family and friends, have a holiday or volunteer to help out at a local charity or other good cause.

It's best not to make any important decisions while you're still in a state of shock. For example, don't rush into moving home or changing jobs

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while you are still grieving; it will

probably be better to wait until the initial shock of your loss has passed, instead of making a quick decision which you may regret later. It will take time to feel less overwhelmed, get your confidence back and start to make sense of the world again.

Help and support from others may help you to cope with your loss. In time you may wish to use your own experience to help others through difficult times.

Useful Links

The organisations listed below provide emotional and/or practical support for people who are bereaved:

Cruse Bereavement Care England & Wales

Cruse offers help to all bereaved people, providing individual counselling, opportunities for social contact and practical advice. You can access this support through your local branch- a list of branches is available on the Cruse website. Cruse also runs a national helpline and a young person's helpline.

National Helpline: **0808 808 1677**

Email: Helpline@cruse.org.uk

Website: www.cruse.org.uk



Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

Helpline: **0845 600 2227**

Mon 10am-8pm: Tues 10am-6pm: Wed 10am-9pm: Thurs 9am-9pm: Fri 10am-

4pm: Sat 9am-12.30pm

Email: Support@crusescotland.org.uk

Website: www.crusescotland.org.uk

Tel: **01738 444 178**

Cruse Bereavement Care Northern Ireland

Helpline: **0808 808 1677**

Website: www.cruse.org.uk/NorthernIreland/index.html

Email: Helpline@cruse.org.uk

Tel: **028 9079 2419**

Hope Again

Hope again is the youth website of Cruse Bereavement Care. It is a safe place, where young people who are facing grief can share their stories with others.

Helpline: **0808 808 1677**

Mon-Fri 9.30am-5pm

Email: Helpline@cruse.org.uk

Website: hopeagain.org.uk

National Association of Widows (England, Wales and Scotland)

offers support and friendship to women who have lost their partners through bereavement. There are local branches and the national organisation arranges regular meetings and conferences.

Website: www.nawidows.org.uk

Tel: **0845 838 2261**



Samaritans

Samaritans offers a 24-hour befriending service to people who are in despair, including those who have been bereaved or who feel suicidal. Details of local



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branches throughout the UK are available on the website.

Helpline: **116123 (Mon to Sun 24/7)**

Website: **www.samaritans.org**

Age UK

Age UK aims to help improve the quality of life of older people. It provides an information and advice service, and produces a series of factsheets, including information on what to do when someone dies, arranging a funeral and bereavement support.



Adviceline: **0800 678 1174** (Mon to Sun 8.00am-7.00pm)

Website: **www.ageuk.org.uk** All other enquiries Tel: **0800 169 8787**

Age UK Cymru

Website: **www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru**

Adviceline: **0800 169 6565** (Mon to Sun 8.00am-7.00pm) Tel: **029**

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