

# Coping with Bereavement



# Grief

Grief is a natural reaction to loss and is always an individual experience.

In our everyday lives, most of us don't have to deal with death and generally death is not talked about very much. Grief is something we learn about only when it happens to us, or when we help someone who is grieving. However, grief is a natural part of life and how we react will be influenced by many things, including our age, personality, family and cultural background, and religious beliefs as well as how the death occurred and how much support we have.

There is no 'right' way to grieve. You may experience a succession of different feelings, or you may find your thoughts and feelings fluctuate and recur, leaving you confused. You might have 'good days' and 'bad days' or ups and downs within any given day. None of this is unusual.

Below are some common thoughts and feelings people have when they experience the death of someone close to them:

## **"I can't believe this is happening"**

In the first few hours and days, or even longer, it is common to feel shocked or stunned. Even when the death is expected, it may be hard to believe what is actually happening.

## **"I feel so numb"**

Feeling numb can actually help people to get through the first few days and weeks and the practical arrangements that have to be made following a death. During this period, you may choose to see the person who has died, which can go some way to overcoming the emotional numbness. Attending the funeral or a memorial service can be a helpful way to say goodbye.

### **“I see them everywhere”**

Even though you know logically that you will not see the person who has died again, you might find yourself constantly searching for them, or expecting them to walk into the house at any moment. Your sleep might be affected and your dreams might be distressing. You might feel restless or anxious and unable to relax or concentrate.

### **“Am I going mad?”**

Grief can feel so overwhelming and unfamiliar that people sometimes fear they are going mad. You might find yourself thinking that life has lost its meaning or purpose and wondering how you can go on. Death can bring a major upheaval to our lives and these feelings are part of adjusting to this. If you are having thoughts of harming yourself, it is important to seek help from your GP as soon as possible.

### **“I feel so angry”**

Sometimes feelings of anger can emerge – towards doctors and nurses, family and friends, the person who has died, God, or everyone and everything. People who have religious beliefs may find their faith challenged. It can help to talk these feelings through with a faith leader.

### **“If only I had...”**

It’s common to feel guilty. Going over and over in your mind all the things that could have been said or done can leave you in torment. Even though death is beyond anyone’s control, people don’t always remember this. Sometimes people feel guilty for being relieved that someone has died, particularly following a distressing illness.

### **“I feel so sad, so tired”**

Grieving can be tiring and people sometimes want to be left alone. Friends and relatives, might worry about this and need reassurance that this is normal. Spates of grief can be sparked by all sorts of things that bring back a memory and these often occur when least expected.

## “I remember when...”

Thinking and reflecting on both the good and the not-so-good times together can help people to come to terms with what has happened.

## “You will always be with me...”




As time passes, the pain of the bereavement may begin to fade. Although you might feel you have lost a part of yourself, and have frequent sad reminders of the person who has died, looking forward is possible.

You might experience a feeling of ‘being whole even while a part is missing’, as you adjust to them now being in your life in a different way. You may find talking to them a comfort and a way of continuing your relationship with them. In time, your sleep and appetite will improve and your energy return, and life will continue without you ever forgetting them.

There is no ‘normal’ way to grieve and these are just some of the emotions and feelings people experience; timescales are different for different people.

# GriefLine

GriefLine is a local resource offering emotional support across West Essex and East Herts to anyone struggling with their grief around the loss of someone.

-  Talk to a trained volunteer who can offer emotional support and a listening ear
-  Talk about your grief in a safe and confidential space, with someone who understands what you’re going through
-  Get help accessing other services and local community resources

**GriefLine is available from  
9am to 4pm every weekday.\***

\*Excluding Bank Holidays.

**If you want to  
talk, we’re here.**

**01279  
945089**

Visit [griefline.co.uk](http://griefline.co.uk)  
to find out more.

## Children and young people

Every child and young person who has experienced the death of a loved one will go through a critical time. Bereavement is a traumatic experience, which could impact their whole life.

As an adult, you might feel excluding children from death, dying and bereavement will protect them, but explaining what has happened, and what will happen next, in an age-appropriate way, is very important. Children need to be involved and given the opportunity to say goodbye, and to talk about the person who's died. It's really helpful to use words that aren't ambiguous. Say 'dead' rather than 'lost' when referring to someone who's died. You might need to be patient and have to keep explaining to the child or young person what has happened, and answer the same questions more than once.

Parents who are grieving themselves can find it difficult to continue routines and remain available to their children. Adjusting to new responsibilities and situations is challenging. So, you might want to consider talking with another trusted adult.

Grief affects every part of a child's life; their known world will have fallen apart. Many will feel unsafe, and perceive the world and life to be unpredictable and unstable. For children and young people, bereavement is complex, which is why being supported will help them through their grieving process.

Grief is unique to the person experiencing it. And there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief isn't linear; it can fluctuate. It can be harder when significant life events occur – like remarrying, the birth of a new child, birthdays.

Children tend to process and display complex emotions very differently to how adults do. Some children might not even realise they're grieving. Their grief might show itself in challenging behaviour, and their emotions might change frequently and suddenly. They might burst into tears one minute, and the next say they want to go out and play. They're not being fickle or insensitive – this is how children grieve. Understanding and accepting this can make it easier for the adult to support the grieving child. Keeping familiar routines as normal as possible can help children feel secure during change and it can help them ground themselves.

Grieving takes time, and it's different for everyone. It's important to allow you and your children enough time to grieve.

## How can others help those who are grieving?

- Spending time with the person who is bereaved, and expressing your care and support, can be a great help to them.
- It's important for the bereaved person to feel able to cry and express their pain and distress without being told they should pull themselves together or should be moving on.
- Sometimes it can be difficult to listen to and understand why the bereaved person repeats the same thing over and over. Both the bereaved and those who support them might find this difficult but it's usually a way of making sense of what has happened.
- Often people don't know what to say and avoid mentioning the name of the dead person. The bereaved person may feel more isolated and sad when the dead person is not mentioned. Talk honestly to the bereaved person about how they think they can be best helped, giving them the opportunity to tell you what they prefer.
- Anniversaries, birthdays and special occasions are often difficult for the bereaved, especially the first ones. Remembering them and being around for them at these times may be a real comfort.
- Helping with practical tasks that might now need to be learned can ease the feeling of being alone: support with childcare, advice on how to pay household bills, cooking meals or getting the car fixed.

## When mourning becomes more difficult

Some people return to normal life quite quickly while others might suffer repeated spells of depression or sadness or develop physical symptoms.

Sometimes people get stuck in their grieving and need more support. Help can be arranged for those who appear not able to adjust to their loss and change of circumstances.

### **“I think I need to talk to someone...”**

Sometimes more help is required when particular thoughts, feelings or behaviours become prolonged:

- Sleepless nights become a regular problem.
- Sadness becomes depression – longer-lasting and nothing gives any pleasure any more, usually with sleep disturbance, poor appetite and loss of energy.
- Inability to think of anything other than the person who has died.
- Grief is causing difficulties at work or inability to work.
- Constant feelings of exhaustion and being ‘empty’.
- Use of substances such as drugs or alcohol.
- Inability to control anger.
- Physical symptoms and problems.
- Self-harming behaviours or suicidal thoughts.

## Bereavement Cafés

Our Bereavement Cafés welcome local people throughout West Essex and East Hertfordshire who have experienced the loss of someone close to them, no matter how long ago. They offer a place to meet and connect with other local people who have had similar experiences. Here at St Clare we believe that some of the most meaningful support you can experience is through talking or listening to others who understand. There are numerous free Bereavement Cafés taking place across our catchment area, which are all drop-in cafés, so you can arrive at any time. We also run Bereavement Café online communities, so you can connect with other bereaved people local to you via Facebook.

For information, and to find your nearest Bereavement Café or online community, visit: [stclarehospice.org.uk/bereavement-cafe](http://stclarehospice.org.uk/bereavement-cafe)

## Our Bereavement Support service

St Clare Hospice offers bereavement support delivered by trained counsellors, social workers, family support workers, chaplain, mentors and bereavement support volunteers for adults, children and young people.

Following the death of a person cared for by St Clare, our Patient and Family Support team, will send you a condolence card, with the contact details for our GriefLine. We understand that everyone experiences grief differently and with this in mind, after five months we will invite you to one of our quarterly Living with Grief sessions.

If you would like information on any of our bereavement services, or just want to talk, please call the St Clare Hospice GriefLine on **01279 945089**. Alternatively, you can contact our Patient and Family Support team on **01279 773762**.

## Bereavement support for children and young people

St Clare Hospice's Children and Young Person's Bereavement Support Service offers compassionate, therapeutic support to help children, young people and their families cope with grief and loss.

We understand that every child's experience of bereavement is unique. Support is offered in different ways at different times, including one-to-one sessions, group support and creative or expressive activities alongside talking therapies.

Our aim is to provide safe, supportive spaces where children and young people can share their feelings, explore their experiences and find ways to live alongside their grief – whether through conversation, creativity, or both.

All referrals begin with a full assessment, ensuring each child is offered the most appropriate support for their needs, at the right time.

If you think your child may require support, please get in touch with our Patient and Family Support team on **01279 773762**.



**01279 773774** First Contact Service  
**01279 773773** 24-Hour Advice Line  
**01279 773762** Patient and Family Support team

**St Clare  
Hospice**



**St Clare Hospice**

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