

About Bereavement

Bereavement is the sense of grief and loss you experience when someone close to you dies. When this happens, you go through a process of mourning - numbness, anger and sadness are all feelings you may experience.

Bereavement can also cause physical reactions including sleeplessness, loss of energy and loss of appetite.

Grief is normal

When someone is bereaved, they usually experience an intense feeling of sorrow.

Grief is a natural process.

Grief is individual and affects people in many different ways.

An inability to grieve can lead to emotional problems, and even physical illness.

Working through your grief can be a painful process, but it is often necessary to ensure your future emotional and physical wellbeing.

Feeling emotionally numb is often the first reaction to a loss. This may last for a few hours, days or longer. In some ways, this numbness can help you get through the practical arrangements and family pressures that surround the funeral, but if this phase goes on for too long it can become a problem.

The stages of grief & common feelings

There is no single way to grieve. Everyone is different and each person grieves in his or her own way. However, some stages of grief are commonly experienced.

- DENIAL
- ANGER
- BARGAINING
- DEPRESSION
- ACCEPTANCE

The stages of grief are not distinct, and there is usually some overlap between them.

There is no set timescale for reaching these stages, but it may help to know about them and that intense emotions and swift changes in mood are normal.

You may also feel **guilty**, dwelling on issues you had with that person or on emotions and words you wished you had expressed.

A period of strong emotion usually gives way to bouts of intense sadness, silence and withdrawal from family and friends. During this time, you may be prone to sudden outbursts of tears, set off by reminders and memories of the person who has died.

Over time, the pain, sadness and depression start to lessen. You begin to see your life in a more positive light again.

Although it's important to acknowledge there may always be a feeling of loss, in time you learn to live with the pain.

The final phase of grieving is to accept the loss of the person who has died and carry on with your life without them, though it may not be the same as it was before.

Your sleeping patterns and energy levels will return to normal.

Children and bereavement

Children are aware when a loved one dies and they feel the loss in much the same way as adults do. Although children go through similar stages of grief, they may progress through them more quickly. Understandably, some people try to protect children from the death and grieving process. But in fact, it's probably better to be honest with children about your own grief, and encourage them to talk about their feelings of pain and distress.

Please read the section on [children](#) and [young people](#) (*place link*)

How long does grieving take?

The grieving process can take some time. How long it takes depends on you and your situation. In general, though, it usually takes one to two years to recover from a major loss.

Coping with the grieving process

There are many things you can do to help yourself cope during this time.

Ask for help and support from family, friends, support group or counselling.

Try to express whatever you are feeling, be it anger, guilt or sadness.

Accept that some things, like death, are beyond your control.

Avoid making major decisions - your judgement may be affected and changes could increase your stress levels.

Give yourself the time and space to grieve.

By doing these things, you are able to mourn properly and avoid problems in the future.

What if you aren't coping?

Sometimes, the grieving process is especially difficult. Some find it impossible to acknowledge the bereavement at all, which can mean that their feelings aren't worked through properly. This sometimes happens after a miscarriage, stillbirth, termination or other sudden death. It may also happen if you don't have time to grieve properly, perhaps because of work pressures or if you are looking after your family.

Some people are unable to move on from their grief, remaining in the numb stages, finding it hard to believe the person is dead.

Such difficult grieving can lead to recurring bouts of depression, loss of appetite and suicidal feelings.

According to Mind (the National Association for Mental Health), you are more likely to have a difficult grieving process if:

- you are on your own and have no support from your community, family, or friends;
- you have unresolved issues with the person who died;
- the death was caused by a particularly difficult event such as a national disaster or an unsolved murder;
- the person goes missing or it isn't clear exactly what happened;
- you are unable to attend the funeral or there isn't one.
- Other circumstances around the death can lead to a difficult grieving process. These include:
 - a sudden or unexpected death;
 - the death of a parent when you are a child or adolescent;
 - miscarriage or the death of a baby;
 - death due to suicide;
 - the death of a co-habiting partner, same sex partner or partner from an extra-marital relationship, where the relationship may not be legally recognised or accepted by family and friends;
 - deaths where the bereaved may be responsible;
 - situations where a post-mortem or an inquest is required;
 - more than one death at once (for example, in an accident);
 - the death of an absent or estranged parent or sibling.

Getting help from your GP

Bereavement is probably one of the toughest things we have to face in life. But while it's a very painful time, you can usually cope without needing to see a doctor. However, if, for example, you find that you're sleeping badly, and this goes on for long enough to affect your daily life, talk to your GP. He or she may prescribe you with some sleeping tablets for a few nights. These should only be used in the short-term.

If your feelings of depression are worsening, and are seriously affecting your energy, appetite and sleep, your GP may prescribe antidepressants.

Helping family or friends

If somebody in your family or a friend has been bereaved, the best thing you can do is spend time with them and listen to them work through their grief.

Offer practical help, such as cooking or shopping for food may be helpful - when a person is grieving, it is usually hard to focus on everyday tasks.

You might feel awkward because you don't know what to say to the bereaved, but just being there will be a great help and lets them know that you care.

If the person is reacting in extreme ways for a prolonged period, encourage him or her to [contact us](mailto:info@bbsonline.org.uk) (*link to info@bbsonline.org.uk*)