

Information for people experiencing grief following a bereavement

What is grief?

At some point during our lives most of us will experience grief. We can grieve after any sort of loss, but most significantly following the death of someone we love. Grief also follows other experiences of death, such as stillbirth, miscarriage or suicide. Since most losses occur later in life and because death is rarely talked about in daily life, we do not have much exposure to grief; it can be hard to know what 'normal' grieving is.

Grief is an ongoing process, involving a range of feelings and emotions. Only by going through this process can people overcome the loss. There is no 'right' way of grieving. There are various stages of grief that are recognised as common which can overlap, occur in different orders, or show themselves in different ways in different people.

It is generally accepted that there are several stages of bereavement; 1) accepting that your loss is real, 2) experiencing the pain of grief, 3) adjusting to life without the person who has died, and 4) putting less emotional energy into grieving and putting it into something new.

Common reactions to grieving

Numbness/ shock even if the death has been expected. The sense of numbness can initially be a help in getting through practical arrangements, such as informing family and organising a funeral.

Yearning or longing to be with the deceased. Some people feel that they 'see' their loved one everywhere they go or in places where they spent time together. It can be difficult to relax, concentrate or sleep.

Anger or protest can be experienced towards others for not preventing the death, for not doing enough, or towards the deceased for 'leaving others behind'.

Guilt can often be experienced over things left unsaid or not done whilst the deceased was alive, things they could have done differently, or over their sense of relief that the deceased person is no longer suffering.

Agitation and depression is usually strongest shortly after the death, but is followed by times of quiet sadness or depression, withdrawal and silence. There can be a strong desire to reminisce and spend time with memorabilia. Waves of grief can occur at any time, triggered by people, places or things that bring back memories of the deceased. Diminished interest in everyday life is common.

What should I expect over time?

Over time, the intensity of early bereavement begins to fade. The depression lessens and it is possible to think about other things again and look to the future. The sense of having lost a part of oneself never goes away entirely but it is possible to move forward in life. Most people recover from a major bereavement within one or two years; the timing varies for everyone and could be much less or longer.

What is the impact on family and friends?

Sudden changes of emotion can be difficult for friends or relatives to understand, but are part of the normal process of grief. It may appear to others as though the bereaved person is spending a lot of time quite preoccupied with their own thoughts and doing very little; this is an essential part of adjusting to the loss.

Grief that is unresolved

Whilst some people resolve their grief relatively easily, others may suffer greatly, which can lead to depression. Some people may not have the opportunity to grieve properly, perhaps owing to the demands of life getting in the way. Others may start to grieve, but not move beyond the sense of shock or disbelief even a very long time beyond the death. Some people struggle to think of anything other than their loss. The nature of the relationship with the deceased can influence whether the grief process becomes complicated; risk factors include having lost a very dependent relationship, lack of social support, previous losses or previous mental health issues.

Do I need additional help?

- For the vast majority of people, with time they will overcome their grief with the support of friends or family, with no additional support being required.
- If someone is struggling to resolve their grief, it may be enough to meet people and talk with others who have been through the same experience by attending informal support groups or by reading self help information.
- For people who are still finding it difficult to cope after several months, it can help to meet with a bereavement support worker.
- If depression becomes an issue affecting appetite, energy and sleep, antidepressants may be helpful in discussion with a GP.

What advice or support is available in Hillingdon?

- Bereavement Care (adult & children)
Email: admin@bereavementcareandsupport.co.uk
<http://www.bereavementcareandsupport.co.uk> Tel: 020 8427 5720
Trained volunteers to support adults and children in the London Boroughs of Harrow and Hillingdon.
- Harlington Hospice Bereavement Service (adult)
Email: H4allcounselling@hillingdonmind.org.uk
<http://www.h4all.org.uk/counselling> Tel 0300 3653300
Counselling available to any adults who have experienced a bereavement.
- Harlington Hospice Child and Adolescent Bereavement Service
Email: cabsreferrals@harlingtonhospice.org
<https://www.harlingtonhospice.org/cabs> Tel 0208 759 0453
Creative Arts Psychotherapy available to pre and post bereaved children age 4-17 years.
- Halo Children's Foundation
Email: info@halochildrensfoundation.org.uk
<https://www.halochildrensfoundation.org.uk> Tel 07903 709622
- CNWL Talking Therapies Service Hillingdon (adult)
<http://www.cnwltalkingtherapies.org> Tel: 01895 206800
Psychological therapies. Self-referral accepted via the website for adults who are registered with a Hillingdon GP. Includes bereavement counselling and specialist therapies for women and men who have lost a baby in the perinatal period.

Other sources of information

- General – www.bereavementadvice.org Tel: 0800 6349494
- Child Bereavement UK - <https://childbereavementuk.org> Tel: 0800 02 888 40
- CRUSE Bereavement care - <http://www.cruse.org.uk> Tel: 0808 8081677
- Child Death Helpline - <http://childdeathhelpline.org.uk> Tel: 0800 282986
- Stillbirth and neonatal death - <https://www.sands.org.uk> Tel: 0808 1643332
- The compassionate friends – www.tcf.org.uk Tel: 0345 1232304
- Lullaby trust – www.lullabytrust.org.uk Tel 0808 8026868
- Widowed and young – www.widowedandyoung.org.uk
- Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide – www.uksofs.org Tel: 03001115065
- Winstons Wish - <http://www.winstonswish.org> Tel: 08088 020021

Self help reading

<http://www.overcoming.co.uk>