

# Bereavement and loss

A self-help guide from the Welfare & Counselling Team



Welfare & Counselling Team  
Office of Student Affairs  
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**Bereavement and loss**

'Grief' and 'mourning' are the words we use for all the feelings, thoughts, reactions which we have when we lose someone important to us or something we value. Grief is painful and stressful, it is normal, natural and necessary- an inevitable and human response to loss.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. We all grieve in our own way and in our own time. You may cry, you may not. Some days are good while others are bad. Your own feelings and responses may be affected, for example, by who the person was who has died, the nature of your relationship to them, the way they died, your previous experience of loss, your own personality, and maybe your social and cultural situation.

Each of us takes our own time to work through grief, there are no hard and fast guidelines for this. Over time the emotional swings, the painful feelings will lessen in intensity as you begin to adapt to this change in your life, but to begin with it can be hard. After the initial shock most people begin, however slowly, to adjust to living without the person who has died. And the time this takes is different for each of us. The change is usually gradual, but over time you will begin to feel less overwhelmed by your loss. At first you may think about the person who has died almost constantly, but in time you will begin to 'forget' at first for a few minutes, then for hours and even days at a time. People, living or dead, do not cease to exist for you when you stop thinking of them.

**Feelings we may experience**

- shock and disbelief, numbness

You don't want to believe it- and who would?

You are not feeling anything, it can take some time for the news of the death to sink in.

- anger

You may well feel angry with the world or with people for:  
causing the death

- not being able to cure the illness
  - making insensitive remarks
  - carrying on with life and having fun
  - you might feel angry with the dead person dying and abandoning you and for the pain you are now feeling
- and you might feel angry with yourself



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- Self-reproach and guilt

You may blame yourself for the last argument you had or for not visiting them the previous week as you'd promised or meant to. You may have negative as well as positive feelings about the person who had died. If the death was from suicide, feelings of regret and guilt may be heightened. Guilt can be our way of trying to feel more in control of the world. To admit that we do not have the power to change events can be very frightening indeed.

- Loss

You miss the person who has died, their love, their friendship, their support, intimacy, hopes and accompanying the loss can be a deep sense of sadness.

- Loneliness

You might feel that no-one can really understand you or what you are feeling.

- Depression

Feeling low is a natural part of mourning. Grief can cause you to have some of the symptoms of depression such as an inability to concentrate or sleep disturbance, and intense sadness. If you are concerned that you might be suffering from depression you may find it helpful to talk to a GP or to a Counsellor.

- Relief

You might feel relief that the suffering is now over- and you may feel this relief for yourself as well as for the person who has died. This too is normal and natural.

- Earlier losses

Your loss can bring back memories and painful feelings from earlier losses- and this can add to your sense of sadness and confusion.

And you may feel that all these reactions will go on forever, which of course they won't.



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**How can grief affect us?**

You may feel it affects you in some or all of the following ways:

- Tiredness

Having all these feelings is exhausting. You may also have practical things you have to do and arrange because of the death. Allow yourself to be tired, to rest as much as possible, to go to bed, to sleep, to not do some of the things which you would normally expect to do.

- Sleep disruption

You may find it hard to get to sleep or to stay asleep or you may wake early

- Appetite disturbance

You may not feel like eating or you may feel like eating very much indeed.

- Preoccupation

You might be so preoccupied with thoughts and memories of the person who has died that you might think you see or hear them (you are not going mad- this is quite common)

- Anxiety and panic

With so many powerful feelings aroused you might become anxious- that you are going crazy (which you're not) or that something terrible might happen.

- Loss of concentration

Again this is quite understandable-you are working through powerful emotions which at them moment are using up your energy and even brain power. You will get them back but right now you cannot force anything.

- Irritability

You can feel as if you are on a very short fuse. You might find yourself 'snapping' at people even if you do not normally do this.

- Clumsiness/ forgetfulness

You may find yourself being more clumsy than usual, banging into things, forgetting things.



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- Crying

Crying can bring relief as it is an outlet for the emotions and tension which have built up.

- Other physical symptoms

For example: feeling sick, tightness in the chest, back pain, dizziness, digestive problems. These are almost always part of our grieving - a response to the stresses and traumatic nature of our loss and a physical expression of our feelings of maybe anxiety, fear, helplessness. If you are concerned about these or any other physical symptoms you may wish to talk to your GP.

All of these are normal and understandable reactions and given time, support and understanding they will lessen and eventually disappear.

**How can we help ourselves though this time?**

- Ask for help. This can take courage and is not always easy. It is OK to need help. Ask someone you feel you can trust- a friend, a GP, a tutor, a college chaplain, a parent. It may help to speak to a Counsellor.
- Talk about your feelings. Talk about the person who has died. It can bring relief to 'get it off your chest'- it helps you clarify and understand what has been going round and round in your head. It also helps you feel less alone.
- Express yourself in some other way. If you don't feel like talking, see whether you can write about your feelings and experience, using any form you feel comfortable with- a poem, letter, diary, song. Or you may find it easier to express your feelings through painting, modelling, dance.
- Get some exercise. Exercise is a way to use up our physical energy and also is a way to express frustration and anger.
- Listen to music. Many people find that music has the power to get through to use in a way that nothing else can. Choose music to suit your mood. And sometimes you may need to take your mind off your loss. Use music to help escape for a time.
- Take good care of yourself. You may feel that you can't be bothered or that there's no point, but it will help. Eat well, bath and shower regularly and get the sleep and rest you need. Some people



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try to block out their feelings using alcohol or drugs - but these only give short-term relief and merely serve to postpone the process of grieving

- Trust and accept yourself. Within reason follow your feelings and reaction. If you want to be alone or to go out then do that. Keep reminding yourself that it is normal to feel the way you do following a bereavement.
- Allow yourself to take each day, each hour each moment as it comes.
- Give yourself space to remember the person.
- Contact the University of Greenwich Counselling Service: [www.gre.ac.uk/students/counselling](http://www.gre.ac.uk/students/counselling)

## Useful Organisations

### Bereavement Advice Centre

Helpline: 0800 634 9494

[www.bereavementadvice.org](http://www.bereavementadvice.org)

Offers advice on all aspects of bereavement from registering the death and finding a funeral director through to probate, tax and benefit queries.

### Carers' UK

Adviceline: 080 808 7777

Tel: 0207 7378 4999

[www.carers.org.uk](http://www.carers.org.uk)

E-mail: [advice@caersuk.org](mailto:advice@caersuk.org)

Provides information, advice and support.

### Child Death Helpline

Helpline: 0800 282 986

Freephone service for anyone affected by the death of a child

### Compassionate Friends

Tel: 0845 123 2304

[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)

Support for parents following the death of a child

### CRUSE Bereavement Care

Bereavement line: 0844 477 9400

[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)



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Offers advice and support for those affected by bereavement. Helpline for bereaved people and carers

**London Friend**

Bereavement Helpline: 0207 403 5969

[www.londfriend.org.uk](http://www.londfriend.org.uk)

Promotes the social, emotional, physical and sexual health and well-being of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Helpline available 7.30pm to 9.30pm every Tuesday.

**Mind Infoline**

Tel: 08457 660 163

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Provides information on a range of topics including types of mental distress, where to get help and support for people in their own area. Helpline available Mon-Fri, 9am 5pm

**National Association of Widows**

Tel: 0845 838 2261

[www.nawidows.org.uk](http://www.nawidows.org.uk)

Provides support and advice for widows and widowers.

**NHS Direct**

Tel: 0845 46 47

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

Health information and advice

**Samaritans**

Tel: 0845 790 9090

[www.samaritians.org.uk](http://www.samaritians.org.uk)

Confidential support for anyone in a crisis

**Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)**

Helpline: 0844 561 6855

[www.uk-sobs.org.uk](http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk)

Provides helpline and support for people affected by suicide

**Victim Support**

Support line: 0845 303 0900

[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

Victim Support is an organisation which offers support and practical help for people who have experienced trauma.