

Learning to live with grief



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Grief



Grief is a process

It is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness.

It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love.

The only cure for grief is to grieve. Trying to bury your grief can cause a war within you; it is like a time bomb ticking deep inside.

If grief is not faced and is buried deep, it can do great damage when it does explode.

*"Grief is the price we pay for love;
it is the cost of commitment"*

We often hear the question, when will I feel better?

No-one can give you the answer to that. There is no timetable for how long you will hurt. You can't measure grief in terms of a calendar.

How do I grieve?

There is no correct way to grieve. This booklet can give you some signposts – how to recognise grief within yourself, and some ways you could help yourself with the process of grief.



Death is the only certainty in life yet that offers us little comfort when we lose a loved one.



Bereavement

Most of us, at some time in our lives, will be faced with the death of someone we care deeply about. Although each of us reacts to loss in different ways we have tried to describe here some of the feelings and experiences most frequently felt by bereaved people.

If you should recognise any of these feelings in yourself, we hope you will take comfort from knowing that others share them. Mourning is the process of adapting to loss. Grief is an emotional response.

Accepting the reality of the loss

At first you may feel numb, strangely calm and detached, or confused and unable to take in what has happened. For a while it may seem impossible to believe that someone has died.

It is quite common to think you can hear or see the dead person. You may look for them in crowds, listen for them when the phone rings, or see them in a favourite chair – even though you may know they will not be there.

At times you may have the feeling that you are searching for something but are never able to find it.

Normal feelings of this early stage of grief can include feeling:

- The world has stopped turning
- We are lonely in our grief
- We want time to stop
- We will never stop hurting
- Cheated to be left behind or not having chance to say goodbye
- Guilty for any number of reasons including being the one still alive
- Angry – again for many reasons
- Utterly broken
- Confused
- Scared about the future

Disorganisation, emptiness, despair



This period may be the longest part of grieving. You may feel that you no longer have a reason for living, that nothing interests you; you may even feel that you are "going mad".

Perhaps you will feel guilty for things you did or did not do. Many bereaved people find themselves feeling angry: with God, family, friends, those they feel are responsible, the hospital and medical staff, themselves, or with the one who has died.

It is not unusual to have difficulty in remembering simple things or doing your normal tasks. Feelings of anxiety, helplessness, fear and tremendous loneliness are felt by many people during this stage. You may very well think that you will never feel better again.

At its worst, we can feel like giving up ourselves.

Many people cope with this early acute grief through family and friends. But sometimes that is not enough or not available to us. If you need more, then reach out for help.

You are never alone. There is always someone to reach out to.



YOU DON'T MOVE ON

But you must move 'with'.
You must shake hands with grief,
welcome her in,
for she lives with you now.

Pull her a chair at the table
and offer her comfort.
She is not the monster,
you first thought her to be.
She is *love*.

And she will walk with you now,
peacefully.
If you let her.

Donna Ashworth



Health



When you are grieving, it is quite normal to feel a range of physical feelings or our behaviour might change. For the most part these are things that happen to many bereaved people, but if they persist you should see your doctor.

Examples of physical feelings of grief

For example, you might just not feel right physically. Grief can show itself in lots of different physical ways. These can include, among others:

- unable to sleep or waking up still tired
- digestive issues
- constant fatigue
- muscle aches and pain
- headaches
- catching every bug
- feelings of anxiety or low mood

Some behavioural signs of grief

Sometimes our behaviours show that grief is knocking on the door:

- Crying unexpectedly
- Feeling angry/shouting at others
- Being forgetful more than usual
- Not wanting to do anything
- Emotional swings
- Not being able to concentrate

Wanting to escape

If the person you have lost is the person you lived with, you may feel that you could cope better if you moved house and disposed of the things that are reminders of the dead person. Bereavement is painful. It is much better to make important decisions like moving house, when you are able to think more clearly and objectively.

Try to avoid making decisions you might regret until you feel better.



Imagine your grief is in two bags you are carrying, and right now they feel really heavy. As time passes, they don't get lighter, you grow stronger to carry them as you learn to live with the grief."

Beginning to live again

In time you will become aware that you are beginning to have good hours and days. You will find that you can listen to that "special" piece of music or remember something that you once shared with the one who has died without feeling so sad.

Gradually you will begin to take up new interests and renew your old ones. At this time, you may sometimes feel you are being disloyal to the person who has died, but you should try to remember that while the past will always be with you, there is a present and a future that you can enjoy.

If you are struggling to move forward with your grief

Sometimes, it feels as though we are stuck with our grief, normality does not return, we are struggling to live with it.

It's important to reach out for help.

On the next page, there are lots of ways to access help free of charge including if your thoughts have turned dark. Alternatively, you might want to find a private therapist.

Friends might recommend someone who has helped them. I would suggest using the **British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy**: www.bacp.co.uk

If you are struggling to find someone, reach out and I can share recommendations.



Ways to get help



Self referral into FREE NHS Talking Therapies. The service is available in Doncaster and Rotherham through:

www.talkingtherapies.rdash.nhs.uk

Fill in a form online or call 03000 211 556.

Charities that support bereavement

These charities can offer a wide range of support – they have practical ideas on their websites and access to counsellors at the end of a phone or on-line.

www.mind.org.uk



www.cruse.org.uk



www.sueryder.org



www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereavement



For children specifically

www.childbereavementuk.org



Loss of a child

www.lullabytrust.org.uk



Loss of a baby or miscarriage

www.sands.org.uk



If you are feeling really desperate, reach out. It is not uncommon for those struggling with grief to have suicidal thoughts just simply not wanting to exist anymore.

Samaritans: Tel: 116 123 www.samaritans.org

Supportline: Tel: 01708 765 200 www.supportline.org.uk



Helping yourself



Grief is individual and each of us reacts to it differently. No-one can completely understand another person's grief.

If you have feelings of guilt, panic, anger, fear or self-pity, do not try to hide them; they are part of your grief. Try to share them with an understanding listener.

If friends seem to be avoiding you, it is possible they are embarrassed because they feel helpless to say or do the "right" thing. They too may be grieving.

Allow yourself to express your feelings – good and not so good – with someone you trust. Allow yourself to cry, to laugh, to be angry. You have lost someone you feel deeply about and it hurts. Allow yourself to experience the pain so that you may work through it.

After the funeral the shock wears off. People go back to their jobs so families and your life has to go on without your loved one. This can be the most difficult time for many people.

Small actions can make a big difference.

- Arrange to meet family & friends even if you don't really feel like it.
- Exercise – even simply walking in nature can help – listening, smelling, touching the world around you.
- Still make the effort – getting dressed, doing your hair, cooking meals
- Day feel empty? Plan it – even routine things like washing & cleaning
- Notice your breathing. Breath steadily – count of three in, pause, count of three out, pause and repeat.

Lots more ideas here:

www.griefandsympathy.com/griefactivities.html



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Each life beautifully remembered