



**OFFICERS'**  
ASSOCIATION

## BEREAVEMENT

Most people will experience bereavement when someone they are close to dies. They will go through many emotions and traumatic experiences as they deal with their grief. This is a natural and normal reaction to the loss of a loved one. Understanding what bereavement means can help us cope better as individuals and help others, whether it's our families, friends or colleagues.

This fact sheet aims to provide information and guidance and a starting point for other sources of help and support when you need it.

## HOW YOU MIGHT BE FEELING

There are no right or wrong reactions to death. We all need to grieve in our own way and in our own time. Reactions and feelings can change from hour to hour and day to day. Some days are good while others are bad; some days you'll be feeling optimistic, and other days, feeling down again.

Over time the emotional swings will lessen in intensity as you learn to adapt to your changed circumstances, but life may be hard, to begin with.

The following is a summary of the most common feelings that people go through.

**Shock and disbelief.** It can take quite some time for news of the death to sink in.

**Loss.** You've lost so much - the person, their love, friendship, companionship, intimacy.

**Guilt and regret.** Maybe you regret having said that hurtful thing or not visiting the previous week as promised. You feel bad for feeling angry. Some will feel 'survivor guilt' - to be alive when another is dead. If the death were suicide, feelings of regret and guilt would probably be heightened. You might also feel shame or blame yourself.

**Injustice.** Why did they have to die? Why did this have to happen to me? It's not fair!

**Anger.** You might feel angry with the world or with people for the cause of death and for things you perceive you did or didn't do and that life is carrying on without your loved one. Perhaps most difficult of all, you might feel angry with the dead person for dying and abandoning you, and for the pain you are suffering as a result.

**Loneliness.** Grieving can be a lonely process. You may feel that nobody can understand what you are going through or that nobody cares.

**Depression.** Feeling low is a natural part of the mourning process. For a time, you could lose interest in life, and think there's no point in going on. At worst, you might feel despair.



## PHYSICAL EFFECTS ON BEHAVIOUR

Grief has a huge impact on our behaviour and functioning. You may find it affects you in some or all of the following ways:

**Sleep disruption.** You may find that you can't get to sleep, or can't stay asleep, or that you wake early.

**Loss of appetite.** You might not feel like eating, or you may feel sick when you do.

**Restlessness.** You may find it hard to relax and 'switch off'. Your mind goes into overdrive trying to make sense of what has happened, especially when you are alone or at night.

**Exhaustion.** Grief is stressful, and if you are also not sleeping or eating well, you are bound to feel tired and worn down.

**Preoccupation.** You might be so preoccupied with thoughts of the dead person that you imagine seeing or hearing them. You are not going mad - this is quite common.

**Anxiety and panic.** With so many powerful and unfamiliar feelings aroused, you might become anxious - that you're going crazy (which you're not) or that something terrible might happen.

**Inability to cope.** You might find it difficult to cope with ordinary, everyday things like shopping, cooking, your work.

**Loss of interest.** Things that were once a source of great pleasure to you now feel meaningless and tiresome.

**Irritability.** You might find yourself 'snapping' despite not typically reacting in this way.

**Tearfulness.** You might cry a lot; in fact, sometimes it's all you can do. Crying can bring relief as an outlet for the emotions, tension and strain that may build up.

**Other physical symptoms.** Palpitations, nausea, dizziness, tightness in the throat and digestive problems - all can be experienced during grieving. If you are concerned, consult your GP.

These are all normal and understandable reactions to bereavement and a natural part of the mourning process. Given time, support and understanding, they will lessen and eventually disappear.

## HOW TO COPE

Most of us have greater reserves of strength than we first imagine. Usually, we don't need to call upon them, but when we are grieving, we do. There may be times when you feel that it is all too much and that you can't cope - but with the help of friends and family and other support networks, such as your GP, you will find ways to cope.

**Talk about it - 'get it off your chest'.** Talking brings relief and helps you clarify and understand what has been going round and round in your head. It also helps counteract feelings of isolation. Again, choose someone you feel you can trust.

**Express yourself in some other way.** If you don't feel like talking, see whether you can write about your feelings and experiences. Choose a form you feel comfortable with; a diary, letter, prose, poetry, song. If you can't find the words to describe what you're feeling, try 'speaking' about your experience through dance, song, music, painting, clay modelling. Let shape, form, texture, colour, rhythm be your words.

**Keep some mementos.** Some photos or jewellery, a piece of clothing, anything that helps you remember the person who has died. Remembering can be painful, to begin with, but over time painful memories will be replaced by ones that can give you pleasure and comfort.

**Get some exercise.** This might be the last thing you feel like doing, but it will help. Exercise uses up excess energy, and it's also a way of expressing some of the frustration and aggression you might be feeling.

**Listen to music.** Many people find music has the power to get through to us in a way that nothing else can. Choose different genres to suit your mood to help you escape for a short time.

**Take good care of yourself.** You may feel you can't be bothered or that there's no point, but it will help. Eat well, bathe or shower regularly and get the sleep and rest that you need. Some people attempt to block out their feelings using alcohol or drugs - but these only bring short-term relief and merely serve to postpone the process of grieving.

**Go easy on yourself.** Don't expect too much of yourself too soon - grieving takes time. Take each moment or hour as it comes. Concentrate on living through the present, and don't worry too much about tomorrow or next week. Give yourself credit for surviving each day.



## USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

- **Independent Age** provide a detailed guide to Coping with bereavement, order your copy [charity@independentage.org](mailto:charity@independentage.org) Tel: 020 7605 4200 Web: [www.independentage.org](http://www.independentage.org)
- **Age UK** provide advice and information for people in later life through their Age UK Advice line, publications and website. Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65 Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm. Web: [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)
- **Cruse Bereavement Care** provides emotional support and information across England, Wales and Northern Ireland through local services offering face-to-face support and a national helpline. Tel: 0808 808 1677 Web: [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)
- **Department for Work and Pensions Bereavement Service** carries out eligibility checks on surviving relatives to see what benefits they are entitled to. Also takes claims for bereavement benefits and funeral payments. Web: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)  
Tel: 0800 731 0469 Textphone: 0800 731 0464  
In Wales, call 0800 731 0453 Textphone: 0800 731 0456  
In Northern Ireland, call 0800 085 2463  
In Scotland contact Social Security Scotland on 0800 182 2222 Web: [www.socialsecurity.gov.scot](http://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot)
- **Samaritans** provides confidential support for people in distress, 24 hours a day. Tel: 116 123  
Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) Web: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
- **Sands** offers support to parents, grandparents and their families when a baby dies during pregnancy or after birth. They can be contacted in the weeks, months or years after loss. Tel: 0808 164 3332  
Email: [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk) Web: [www.sands.org.uk](http://www.sands.org.uk)
- **The Compassionate Friends** is a national self-help organisation. Bereaved parents offer friendship and support to other bereaved parents, grandparents and their families. Tel: 0345 123 2304 Northern Ireland Tel: 0288 77 88 016 Email: [helpline@tcf.org.uk](mailto:helpline@tcf.org.uk)  
Web: [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)
- **Winston's Wish** offers support, information and guidance to people caring for a bereaved child or young person. Tel: 08088 020 021 Web: [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)



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|| **EVERY OFFICER  
EVERY FAMILY**



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