

Bereavement

Support with Grief



What is Grief?

Grief is a natural response to losing someone or something significant to us. When someone dies, it can make our whole world suddenly seem different. The sense of loss can be huge. Grieving is the process of gradually making sense of what happened and adjusting to life as it is now. This process can at times feel incredibly painful.

Grieving does not have to involve 'letting the person go'. Instead, it can be about finding a new place for them in your life that helps you to move forward.

There is no timeframe for grieving. In fact, many people say that a sense of loss always remains.

What might I experience?

Grief can involve a huge range of emotions and some can be very intense and painful. Feeling shock or disbelief is common. Many people find that they feel completely numb, perhaps as a way to protect themselves from overwhelming emotions. Sometimes people recount the early days following a death by using metaphors such as:

“It was like I was on a different planet”

“The rug had been pulled from under me”

“It felt like a dream, it wasn't my life anymore”.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve and everyone feels different things at different times. In fact, we can feel a complete mix of emotions all at once. For example, it is possible to enjoy a happy memory whilst also missing the person desperately. It is impossible to predict how we will feel from day to day. We can experience feelings like waves that come and go. Sometimes these waves feel overwhelming, but the intensity does eventually pass. Some people worry about what they are experiencing, thinking

“Am I losing my mind?”

...when in fact what they are going through is normal.



Some common feelings include:

- A deep sense of emptiness, sadness or yearning for the person who died
- Anger – much more common than people think. The sense of having something taken away can leave a feeling of anger or a sense of injustice. This anger can be directed at anyone, including yourself, the person who died, friends and family or the world in general.
- Guilt – another very common emotion. “What if” and “if only” can accompany this feeling of guilt, when people recall things they did or wish they had said or done. It is important to try not to dwell on these thoughts and, over time, reach a point where we can accept “what is”.
- Fear and anxiety – this can occur alongside feeling out of control, helpless and worried about what will happen in the future. It can help to voice our fears and have them acknowledged
- Feeling restless or agitated
- Relief – this can be especially common if the person was in any kind of pain or discomfort, or if the relationship with them was often stressful or difficult. It is alright to feel relieved

Some people find they are affected in more physical ways. Changes to appetite, sleep and energy levels are common. Some people feel aches and pains, experience digestive problems or have sensations like a lump in the throat or tightness in the chest. Whatever the cause, the physical sensations and symptoms are very real.

Grief also affects our thoughts and beliefs. It can cause us to question what we believed about life and death, and the world around us. We can lose interest in things that we usually enjoy, including spending time with other people.

Some people have a strong sense that the person is with them – that they can see, hear or feel them – or that the person will walk through the door again at any moment. These moments may lessen over time.

For those who have been affected by losses in the past, a bereavement may trigger memories which can be distressing, particularly if there are painful feelings surrounding these losses. Some people are surprised to find they react differently to another loss, thinking they would feel the same as they did previously. However, there are so many things that affect our experience of grief and it is impossible to predict how we will think or feel about a different situation.

Dealing with Those Around You

Whilst dealing with our own grief can be difficult, the way other people act around us may affect us too. Although not meaning to add to our distress, when others avoid us or do not acknowledge the person who has died, ignore or minimise our grief or give unwanted advice, we can feel frustrated and hurt. We can tell people what we need from them – perhaps we are not looking for advice or for other people to try and fix what cannot be fixed but simply for them to listen and offer their support.

Other people around us may also be grieving. Where possible, it can be helpful to try and share thoughts, feeling and memories and offer reassurance. It is also good to remember that each person may need quite different things at different times and to be sensitive to each other's needs.

Coping with Bereavement

Coming to terms with someone's death takes time. Even when things begin to feel a little more normal, something may trigger the acute and intense feelings that were felt in the early days of grief – this may be anything from a sound or a smell, to an anniversary or life event we wish we could share with them. Having these experiences does not mean that we are 'going backwards'. These moments should become easier to cope with over time. As we continue adjusting to how our lives have changed, it becomes easier to make plans and take an interest in life again. This does not mean we have forgotten the person or left them behind, but it is really important to attend to the rest of life whilst keeping a place for them in it.

Sometimes, the very times we need to take the most care of ourselves are when we least feel like doing it. It is important to prioritise our own wellbeing – this can involve:

- **Eating and drinking well**
- **Getting enough rest (even when sleep is difficult)**
- **Trying to keep some routines**
- **Telling those around us what we need**
- **Staying connected to people who support us or finding new social supports**
- **Continuing to take any medications and/or maintain appointments**
- **Seeking help with any practical needs or day-to-day tasks which we can no longer manage ourselves**

Over time...

- **Finding things that we enjoy or give us a sense of purpose**
- **Making plans for things to look forward to**
- **Thinking ahead to significant dates, such as anniversaries and birthdays, and planning how to manage these days. It may be an opportunity to remember the person with others or it may be easier to plan for time alone to remember them personally**
- **Seeking further support if we are not moving forward because we are 'stuck' in our grief and struggling to cope**

Things can be done at our own pace as and when we feel we can manage them.



Support for you

For lots of people, grief is a very normal process and they can get through it with the support of their family, friends and community. Grief is not a condition to be fixed. The pain you may feel is natural. Sometimes finding people other than family members who are good listeners, or can help us manage change, can be really helpful. They can acknowledge your own thoughts and feelings without being too personally involved.

Some people might need a bit of extra support if they cannot move forward because their grief is too hard to manage, or is complicated by other difficult things in their life. If this is the case, it is important to reach out for some help.

Some sources of support include:

The Highland Hospice Adult Bereavement Service is available to anyone who lives in Highland over the age of 18, who has been bereaved by the death of a family member or friend.

If you are struggling to find support that is right for you, get in touch with us and we will be happy to help.

Highland Hospice Bereavement Officer:

bereavement@highlandhospice.org.uk

07709 717586



Did you know ...

Highland Hospice supports
a community of more than
230,000 people!

To contact Highland Hospice:
please call 01463 243132 or email
generalenquiries@highlandhospice.org.uk

www.highlandhospice.org

Highland Hospice, Ness House, 1 Bishops Road, Inverness IV3 5SB.
Highland Hospice is a registered Scottish Charity No: SCO11227



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

