



Information Sheet: Bereavement

What is grief?

Grief is the word used to describe the feelings we have when someone close to us has died. It is a natural process, though it can feel unfamiliar (we are not exposed to death now as in the past), unwanted and very painful. It can also be differently expressed according to different cultures and belief systems. There has been lots of research around the grieving process and many models exist. But most people agree that each person's grief will be individual; there is no 'right way' to mourn the death of the person you miss. You may not want to do your grieving in the way others want you to! Grieving is a natural process that needs to be experienced and cannot be hurried, in order for recovery to begin to take place. When it is interrupted or blocked, however, it may give rise to problems.

Symptoms:

The feelings, thoughts and physical symptoms which accompany grief can be extremely painful and frightening. They can leave us feeling that we are completely alone, unable to cope or might be going mad. We can often have unrealistic expectations of ourselves, believing we should be feeling better, or that it is wrong, weak-willed or self-indulgent to grieve.

Responses to grief can include:

- Not feeling able to accept the loss, feeling unable to cry
- Overwhelming feelings of numbness, emptiness and unreality
- Wondering why it had to happen - a feeling of unfairness and of being cheated
- Dreaming about the person or thinking you have seen or heard them
- Conflicting emotions such as stress, anger, resentment, sorrow, anxiety, panic or regret
- Experiencing physical and mental pain, possibly even some of the symptoms

- the person who has died had in their final illness
- Desperately missing the person who has died - feeling lonely and vulnerable

How you can help yourself:

Give yourself permission to grieve and be patient with yourself. Is there anyone you can talk to who lets you be honest about how you are feeling? Avoid making any major decisions until you feel better. Try to eat and rest little and often, even if you don't feel like doing either. Remember that anniversaries, birthdays and special occasions may bring difficult thoughts and feelings back again – try to be especially kind to yourself at these times.

How CCL can help:

The support of those around you can often be enough to help you through your grief. We usually suggest you wait for several months after the loss to allow the natural process to take place before seeking professional help.

However, sometimes the bereavement process can become blocked: long after the loss, the intensity of the grief remains, leaving us unable to get on with our lives. It can help to talk in confidence about your feelings, to a qualified and experienced counsellor. You can be referred to us for our free counselling service by your GP or you can refer yourself to our Co-payment Counselling Service (see below for contact details).

Other sources of help:

www.rcpsych.ac.uk - click Mental Health Info tab and go to link to bereavement leaflet and use the search box, typing in "bereavement".

www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/relationships-and-family/bereavement

www.winstonswish.org.uk/ - national charity for bereaved children

Books: 'A Grief Observed' by C S Lewis or 'The Year of Magical Thinking' by Joan Didion