



Your first steps to
**Bereavement
Support**



Grief is a very natural, normal and necessary reaction when someone close to us dies, but that doesn't mean it is any less painful.

This booklet can help you to recognise how grief might be affecting you and to understand that although it can seem overwhelming at times, it is perfectly normal to feel this way when you are adjusting to living with a loss.

Explore our website to find out more about how we could help you, or call our advice line

01233 504127

No one finds it easy

Death is part of our life, facing the loss of someone we love is never easy. We all know that people have to die, but we prefer not to think about it until we have to face the reality of someone close to us having a serious illness. A death may be sudden and unexpected, leaving us totally unprepared. There may, however, be a warning. There may be time to make some adjustments, but the grief which follows is no less painful. We are left feeling numb and believing that our lives have lost their direction and purpose.

Sorrow and grief are deeply painful, and no one can really prepare us for them. We feel that no one else can understand how much we hurt inside. But the pain and the sorrow are the price we pay for loving, and the love goes on even though death has intervened.

The grieving process

Grief is not a single event. It is a process which takes time to work through, during which we find out how to adapt to our loss.

There is no right way or wrong way to grieve

Our feelings of grief are as personal and individual as any other feelings.

Grief brings feelings to the surface; crying helps us to express our emotions freely and openly and can be very helpful and healing.

The strong feelings we have had for our loved ones remain and give rise to our sorrow which is natural.

Feelings

The sorts of feelings people have do not follow any consistent pattern, but usually include some of the following; they can appear at any time and in any order. Perhaps you began by feeling numb, unable to accept the reality of the loss, wanting to cry but not being able to. Perhaps you could not believe it could happen to you. Or you may have had the opposite reaction, weeping at the slightest provocation and crying yourself to sleep at night. You will almost certainly ache inside, and feel nothing can be the same again. You may feel you cannot go out on your own and feel afraid of meeting new people or of answering the telephone, or you may just want to sit and look at photographs.

You may even feel as if your loved one is going to walk through the door at any moment, and find yourself making plans as if they were still here with you.

Maybe you keep asking 'why'? Feeling angry about a life cut short and being denied time together, or even blaming yourself for something done or left undone. All these things are normal and usual.

The pain and the sorrow are the price we pay for loving

When these feelings come over you, you may feel dreadfully alone and without help. Even if you have a strong faith, you may not find it a comfort at this time. All of these feelings are not only natural, but common in grief.

Bereavement is one of the hardest things to have to cope with. That you feel ill, off-balance, unable to sleep at night and fearful of the future is hardly surprising when you are faced with what is possibly the biggest change you have ever had to deal with.



Adjustment

Grief is not something you can 'get over' like a cold, or can 'snap out of'. Grief remains a part of us. In time it is possible to adjust to it, to make allowances for our feelings and to understand ourselves when we get angry over little things, or feel hurt or cheated. It is worth remembering that although no one can shelter you or take the pain away, people nearly always do manage to find ways to cope eventually. While it's hard to see your way out of the dark tunnel of grief, every tunnel has a way through to light at the other end.

Grief is not something you can 'get over'

In time, you will find new strengths, new opportunities and new courage to lift some of the burden from you and to build a new life. If you can cherish good memories, as well as building new interests and people into your life, it regains a purpose. You may want to take time in making major decisions.

You cannot avoid memories: there will be reminders all around you, but the most poignant ones are buried deep within you and nothing can or should obliterate them. Remember with honesty, with tears or joy, both the good times and the bad times. Try not to worship an idealized image of your loved one.

Grief is an individual process

It can help to take one day at a time. There can be an expectation from others that you will be fully recovered after six months, when in fact people may grieve for much longer and you, like everyone, can expect anniversaries, birthdays and special occasions to be difficult and times when you need more support.

Grief is a very individual process. Here we have included a selection of frequent statements from others who have been bereaved which you may find helpful.

I don't believe he's gone, I can still hear and see him...

Even when you have known for some time that someone is going to die, there is still a sense of shock when the death occurs. You may feel cold, numb, empty and unreal for a time, and have trouble in believing that they are really dead and are not coming back. This sense will start to fade in a few days or weeks, although it may return from time to time. When it does, you might feel that you can hear or see them again, and each time there will be fresh shock and disbelief when you realize the truth of the loss. One extension of this belief is that you may dream of the one who has died.

I don't seem to be able to settle down to anything, yet there's so much needs doing...

You will probably find it difficult to concentrate, feel that your thoughts are confused and that everything is an effort. You may lose your appetite, become forgetful and feel tired, yet have difficulty in sleeping.

Try to eat proper food rather than snacks, and try to get adequate rest even if you cannot sleep. Most people cry many times when they remember the person who has died, or some part of the funeral; while this can leave you exhausted, it is a normal way of letting your grief out. Holding it in can be just as exhausting.



I always seem to want to talk about it

There is often a recurring need to talk about the dead person, their illness and death, the good times and the bad times. The best way in which family and friends can help is to listen and to share this remembering, although they may find this listening painful themselves or embarrassing because they do not know what to say.

Sometimes I can't remember...

Life may seem flat and aimless, but you can allow memories to come and stay - whether they are good memories or bad. Just as our own faults can lead to regrets and feelings of guilt, we must remember that other people have faults. We preserve their memory more fully if we remember the whole person, faults as well as virtues. If you find your memories have gaps, try talking with someone who will help you to explore these spaces and fill them.

I don't think I will ever be happy again...

Things may feel so bad that you cannot see any prospect of them ending. In some ways, they don't end, because your memories remain, but much of the pain does become less acute. At some stage, you will find that your sadness is interrupted by pleasure about something that happens now. These feelings of pleasure don't mean that you're not caring for the dead person. It may help to renew old interests and in time seek new ones.

But being alternately sad and happy can be very confusing and difficult to cope with, and special anniversaries, including birthdays and Christmas, can be particularly difficult.

No one seems to understand how I feel - they tell me I should be over it by now...

People who tell us not to get upset mean well, but perhaps do not realise that distress, which may continue for months, is natural and right when someone close to us dies. Try to go to someone who will understand your need to grieve and be upset.

In some ways the pain of grief itself stayed much the same...but as time went on my world expanded so it felt less suffocating

Following a bereavement, most people find the support they receive from family and friends is enough to help them through their grief.

Some people may find it helpful to meet up with other bereaved people - to share experiences with each other and gain support from people who are in a similar situation.

Other people may prefer to speak to a professional who is specially trained in bereavement support such as a counsellor.



Pilgrims Stepping Stones Bereavement Support

We offer a variety of bereavement support services at our Canterbury, Ashford and Thanet hospices. Some groups are available to anyone living in east Kent who needs bereavement support, even if their loved one was not a patient of the hospice. See below for further details.

Stepping Stones Bereavement Café

Many people find it helpful to share their experiences of grief with other people in similar situations and this informal support group provides the opportunity to meet and talk with other bereaved people in an relaxed and supportive way over a coffee and a biscuit.

Facilitated by Pilgrims trained Bereavement Support Volunteers, Stepping Stones Bereavement Café meets regularly at each of our hospice sites at Ashford, Canterbury and Margate. For more information please call 01233 504127 or email steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org

Who is it for? Any adult living in east Kent who has experienced a bereavement – there is no requirement to have previously been supported by Pilgrims.



Bereavement Walk & Talk Group

The benefits of being in nature, gentle exercise and social interaction are well known, and this informal bereavement support group provides the opportunity to combine all three. Our trained Volunteers will guide you along a gentle paced walking route, set in a beautiful tranquil location, promoting wellbeing and encouraging you to meet new people, share experiences and support each other in grief.

Meeting regularly at various public walking routes in the Canterbury, Ashford and Thanet areas – each walk lasts approximately 45 minutes and there is parking available at the meeting point with somewhere to buy refreshments along the route. For more information please call 01233 504127 or email steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org

Who is it for? Any adult living in east Kent who has experienced a bereavement – there is no requirement to have previously been supported by Pilgrims.



Understanding Your Grief

This informative one off bereavement support session provides an insight into the way grief can affect you, helping you to understand that grief is a process which takes time to work through. It aims to help you to identify the feelings and emotions that you might be experiencing and to recognise that these are perfectly normal reactions to have when someone close to you dies. This session also encourages peer support and includes time to talk to, and share experiences with other bereaved people in an informal and supportive group setting.

Facilitated by Pilgrims Bereavement Support Team, Stepping in to Grief is held monthly at each of our hospice sites at Ashford, Canterbury and Margate and is suitable for people who have been recently bereaved. For more information please call 01233 504127 or email steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org

Who is it for? Family/friends of hospice patients

Therapeutic Bereavement Counselling

Pilgrims accredited and experienced team of counsellors and volunteer counsellors are specifically trained to offer one to one therapeutic bereavement support either face to face, over the telephone or via video call. If you feel overwhelmed with grief or you are struggling to adjust following bereavement and you think counselling might be helpful please contact us and request a consultation with one of our counsellors.

Who is it for? Family/friends of hospice patients for up to two years after bereavement.

To access any of the bereavement support services above, or if you would like to speak to someone about what support might be most helpful to you, your children or other members of your family, please contact us on 01233 504127 or email steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org

Bereavement support for children and young people

Explore our website to find out more about how we could help you, or call our advice line

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Children grieve too

As adults we want to protect the children in our family, which is a natural response to the circumstances. However, children, like adults, have feelings which they need to express, many of which will be similar to those described in this booklet, but there are differences depending on the age of the child.

In some ways grief doesn't end, because your memories remain

No child is too young to notice that an important person is no longer around and it is important to tell all children, in simple language, that the person has died and is not coming back. If children do not understand what has happened they can become confused and anxious, so not telling the truth can be harmful.

Young children in particular find it difficult to grasp the concept of past and future, and only see the present as being real. They may repeat obvious questions or seem callous, but this is the result of their need to concentrate on the here and now. They may be distressed one minute and want to go and play the next as they continue to explore the world and enjoy it – this is quite natural.

In general children find it difficult to express their feelings in words, so their feelings often come out through changes in behaviour. However, like adults, every child will respond differently to bereavement depending on age, maturity, temperament, their closeness to the person who has died and how secure and supported they feel.

Don't hide your grief from the children in your family, seeing you grieve and hearing you talk about the person who has died may help them express their feelings and talk too. Spending extra time with children in the early part of bereavement will help them feel secure, as will keeping their routine as normal as possible and reassuring them that it is okay to have strong feelings. Talking to them over time, drawing pictures, creating memory boxes, writing stories, making albums about family events and the person who has died all helps the child keep their memories alive and work through their grief.

Other useful contacts

CRUSE – Bereavement Care

National Helpline 0808 808 1677
www.cruse.org.uk
Local CRUSE numbers
Swale 07999 385 877
East Kent 07507 656 023
eastkentswale@cruse.org.uk
South Kent (Ashford, Dover and Shepway)
0844 8009104
southkent@cruse.org.uk

National Bereavement Service

Offers practical and emotional support and legal assistance
www.thenbs.org
0800 0246 121

WAY

Widowed and Young
Support for widowed men and women under 50.
www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

Friend

Support for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people expecting or experiencing bereavement and also for their families and friends.
LGBT Bereavement
www.londonfriend.org.uk

SoBS

For adults who have been bereaved by suicide.
Helpline 0300 111 5065
www.uksoobs.org

The Compassionate Friends

An organisation for bereaved parents and families, offering support after the death of a child.
Helpline 0345 123 2304
www.tcf.org.uk/London

Winston's Wish

Practical support and guidance to those supporting a bereaved child.
Helpline 0808 8020021
www.winstonswish.org

Holding On and Letting Go

Weekend bereavement programmes for children, plus parent and carer group run in Kent.
www.holdingonlettinggo.org.uk
Helpline 03445 611 511
info@holg.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK

Helpline 0800 02 888 40
www.childbereavementuk.org



Find out more about
our work and other ways
you can support us.

Call: 01233 504127

Email: steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org

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