

Dealing with Emotions when someone has passed away Guide

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Introduction

You are probably reading this guide because someone close to you has died recently.

Although bereavement is a highly personal event, there are recognisable reactions and emotions many of us experience when someone we are close to dies.

Sometimes people are shocked and upset by their changing and powerful emotions when they are bereaved.

Realising that these feelings are quite normal may help.

Bereavement Grief

Grief may affect you emotionally, physically and mentally. It may also affect the way you relate to others. If the death was expected, you may be telling yourself you should be able to cope, yet you can't.

Perhaps you think you should be over it, but you aren't. Or you think you should feel all right because you have family and friends looking out for you – but you don't, because no one can replace the person who has died.

When you're bereaved, you have to cope with a world that can feel as if it's fallen apart.

In practical terms, your life may have changed dramatically. You may have less money, and have to eat, sleep and live alone for the first time, or be faced with household or financial tasks that you haven't done before.

Losing a close family member or old friend can mean that you don't have anyone to share childhood memories or family stories with.

The biggest changes are probably the emotional ones. It can seem that everything you took for granted has gone and you've lost your sense of identity and self-worth.

You may feel that you've lost almost everything and haven't much left to fall back on or look forward to. And you may feel like this even if you have loving friends and family around you.

Grief can make you feel many different things. It's important to remember that these feelings are not bad or wrong. They are simply how you feel.

Bereavement Your feelings

At first you may be too shocked to feel anything, even if the death was expected. Many bereaved people say that, initially, they felt a sense of numbness and disbelief.

As you get over the shock and start to grasp the reality of what's happened, you may have many powerful feelings.

Sometimes you may feel you are coping but at other times you may have feelings of despair.

You may feel that you can't control your emotions or manage to carry out simple tasks such as making a phone call or a cup of tea. It may seem as though everything you knew has gone and nothing will ever make sense again. You may feel that you don't care whether you live or die, because you can't imagine living without the person who died. Your loss may feel overwhelming and you're likely to be reminded of it constantly.

Adjusting to a death is gradual and happens differently for everyone.

Bereavement Your thoughts

Many bereaved people find it hard to concentrate, and feel confused and forgetful. Your thoughts may constantly return to the person who died, with painful questions and fears running through your mind. Alongside this, you may have a sense of relief if they died at what seemed to be the right time for them. As you think and talk more about the person and listen to what relatives and friends say, you're likely to start building a fuller picture of them than you had before.

As it grows over time, you'll probably find that this picture becomes a part of your life and a source of comfort.

Bereavement Your body

Physical changes after bereavement can include difficulty getting to sleep, vivid dreams and long periods of wakefulness. You may lose your appetite. Some people feel tense and short of breath, or edgy and restless; others feel slow and lethargic. You're likely to feel exhausted, especially if you were caring for the person who died or had been through an anxious time before their death.

Strong emotions and dealing with all the things that need to be done after a death can also leave you tired and drained.

The stress of grief can make you more susceptible to colds and other infections, or make you more accident-prone.

Take extra care of yourself – try to eat well and get some rest even if you can't sleep. If you have any long-term health conditions, make sure you remember to take any medication, and keep your regular doctor's appointments. Take gentle exercise if you can. Be kind to yourself – don't try to do too much while you're grieving.

Bereavement Coping with the death

Adjusting to a death is gradual and happens differently for everyone. Allowing your feelings to come out can help you cope with your loss. Talking about the death and the person who died, dealing with the practicalities of your new situation and trying to think of the present as well as the past can all help you take in the reality of the death.

You will slowly begin to find a way of living without the person alongside you, but very much with the person in your thoughts and memories.

Many support organisations also have online forums where you can get support from others in similar situations

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Bereavement Difficult times and feelings

You will probably go through a range of emotions after the death, although you may not experience them all, and they may not occur in any particular order.

It can take a long time to get used to a bereavement, but hopefully with support you will adjust.

Emptiness and depression Feelings of depression and meaninglessness can hit you when the reality of the death begins to sink in. Just when you think you've started to move on and are feeling better, you may hit rock bottom and feel that life is endlessly bleak and empty. Surprisingly, although it may feel almost unbearable at the time, this seems to be a period when some inner healing takes place. Afterwards people say they feel lighter, more in control of their lives and better able to look forward.

Sadness is a natural response to bereavement, but for some people it may become depression. This can be managed and you should see your doctor for help and advice. You may feel awkward talking to your GP about feelings, but your GP is there to help you. You don't have to try to cope on your own.

If you start to feel you might hurt yourself in some way, it's important to tell someone about it as soon as possible – ideally your doctor. You can call Samaritans at any time of the day or night on 08457 90 90 90

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Bereavement Anger

Some people feel angry after they have been bereaved and this can be one of the hardest feelings to cope with. You may feel anger at the injustice of your loss, or at the lack of understanding in others. You might be angry at yourself and at the person who died, who has left you feeling abandoned, frightened and alone.

This anger is usually a result of feeling hurt and unhappy. These feelings are normal and you can often let them out in a way that doesn't hurt you or someone else. Some people have a shouting session, others dig the garden or write their thoughts on paper and then destroy the pages. Don't bottle up your feelings – try to think about the reasons for your anger.

Talking about your feelings with someone who isn't emotionally involved in your own loss can help. Fear Feeling fearful and anxious is very natural – your familiar world has been turned upside down. You are likely to feel that you have little control over your life, your thoughts and emotions. This is likely to make you feel vulnerable and afraid. But as you get used to coping, you will become more confident.

You may also have fears about practical issues, such as how to manage on a smaller income and handle household tasks.

Bereavement Mixed feelings

It's normal to have mixed feelings when someone dies. You may think about things that you wish had been different, or ask yourself endless 'what ifs' about decisions you could have made. Mixed feelings of regret, guilt or anger aren't easy to deal with.

Try to reach a point where you're being realistic about the past. This can be hard if the relationship had turned sour or was always a mixture of good and bad. When a difficult relationship ends with death, any chance of mutual understanding or reconciliation is lost. But if you suppress upsetting thoughts or feelings, you risk becoming angry, bitter or depressed. It can help to get a better understanding of the relationship by thinking about what was good and what was not, and what you each contributed to it.

Try not to be too hard on yourself or anyone else. No one is perfect and we can only do our best with the situation we are in. With time, you're likely to reach some acceptance of the past and move towards a more rewarding present.

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Bereavement can trigger memories of earlier losses that you thought you had coped with. Perhaps you didn't realise at the time how deeply affected you were, or maybe it was difficult to talk about your feelings. You may find memories of these unhappy times rushing back and this can be extremely distressing. For example, some people are only just beginning to grieve for losses that happened during the war. Others who had a stillborn baby or a miscarriage, a child who died, or a sibling who died young, may only now start to grieve openly.

Fifty or so years ago we didn't tend to talk about our emotions and children's feelings were often overlooked. You may have gone through life burdened with an unspoken sadness. You may feel the need to mourn these losses and talk about your experiences before you can start to cope with your more recent bereavement. If you can, talk to friends and family about how you're feeling. See your GP if you feel you want to talk to a grief counsellor.

Bereavement Picking up the pieces

Over time, you have probably developed beliefs and ideals that have helped give meaning to your life and influenced the decisions you have made. Your thinking and beliefs may be based on a particular faith, religion or philosophy, or may have been very much your own creation. Your beliefs may comfort you and continue to give your life meaning. But you may find that they don't live up to the challenges presented by your bereavement, leaving you feeling let down and lost. This can be unnerving, but it is also a chance to look at life afresh. It could lead to a strengthening of your beliefs and views, or you may decide to explore other ways of giving meaning to your life.

Other people Some people will be more sensitive to your feelings than others. If the death was expected, some people may think that you will not be too affected by it. Others may fear saying the wrong thing or try to avoid facing up to the fact that one day they will be in a situation similar to yours.

A significant bereavement can put a strain on other relationships, as people in the family may grieve in different ways, and need different things. This can cause misunderstandings and conflict, so it can sometimes help to talk things through together.

Some couples or families find that grief will bring them closer together. Sometimes the people who help most aren't the obvious ones – someone you aren't particularly close to could be the one who helps you through the bleak times.

There are befriending and other support services in many areas – ask at your place of worship, if you have one, or doctor's surgery or local library, or search online for local services.

Bereavement Looking to the future

When you lose someone you love, you can feel that your life doesn't have much meaning, or that you no longer have anything to offer. Looking back at your life and taking stock of your contribution to the world can help you to realise that a bereavement doesn't take that away.

Remind yourself of all that you are and what you've made of your life; think of the people you care about and who care about you. It's also important to look forward, however difficult this may be. Everyone has something to offer the world. It's worth making the most of every opportunity to spend time with other people, keep in touch with friends and family, have a holiday, learn something new, or help out with a good cause.

Sometimes people jump into major decisions when they are particularly vulnerable and emotional and this may lead to more stress. It can be helpful to take time over decisions such as moving house or changing jobs. There are no magic answers.

It takes time to regain confidence, feel less overwhelmed by your loss and start to make sense of the world again. Help and support from others, especially those who have gone through a similar loss, may help you to cope with your bereavement.

In time, you may be the person who can help others through difficult times.

If you have any queries or require further information please contact me on **07825 331447** or email **info@aj-wills.co.uk** or visit our website **www.aj-wills.co.uk**