

Coronavirus bereavement

When someone you love dies



A guide to helping teenagers grieve - and further advice in relation to the Coronavirus situation

About this guide

This guide has been written to help you manage the distressing and confusing reactions that happen to you when someone dies. Bereavement is the name given to explain the experience we have following the death of someone we know.

It can be a close bereavement such as of a parent, brother or sister, grandparent, friend, close family friend, or a relationship that was important to you, or the bereavement of someone we were not as close to but who was important to us. When we are bereaved we experience grief.



This guide will give you information to help you understand your grief better, to reassure you about what is happening to you and support you in thinking about what would help you work through your grief. It will also tell you where to get extra help and support if you need to.

What's in this guide

What is grief?	3
What is grief after a bereavement like?	3
Grief in the early days and weeks	3
Common reactions that you are likely to have early on	5
Things that can affect how you grieve	6
Common emotions when we grieve	10
Common reactions later on	11
What can help you to manage your grief?	12
More about what can help you as you grieve	13
Who can help you to manage your grief?	16
People close to you	16
People at school or college	16
How you can find extra help?	17
Bereavement support online	17
Emergency Support	18

What is grief?

Grief is the name that we give to all the reactions that happen to a person after a bereavement. This involves your emotions, thoughts and body, which together are called grief. Grief is what we all experience. It is the way we come to understand what has happened, find ways to express our painful feelings of loss and adjust to living our lives without the person.

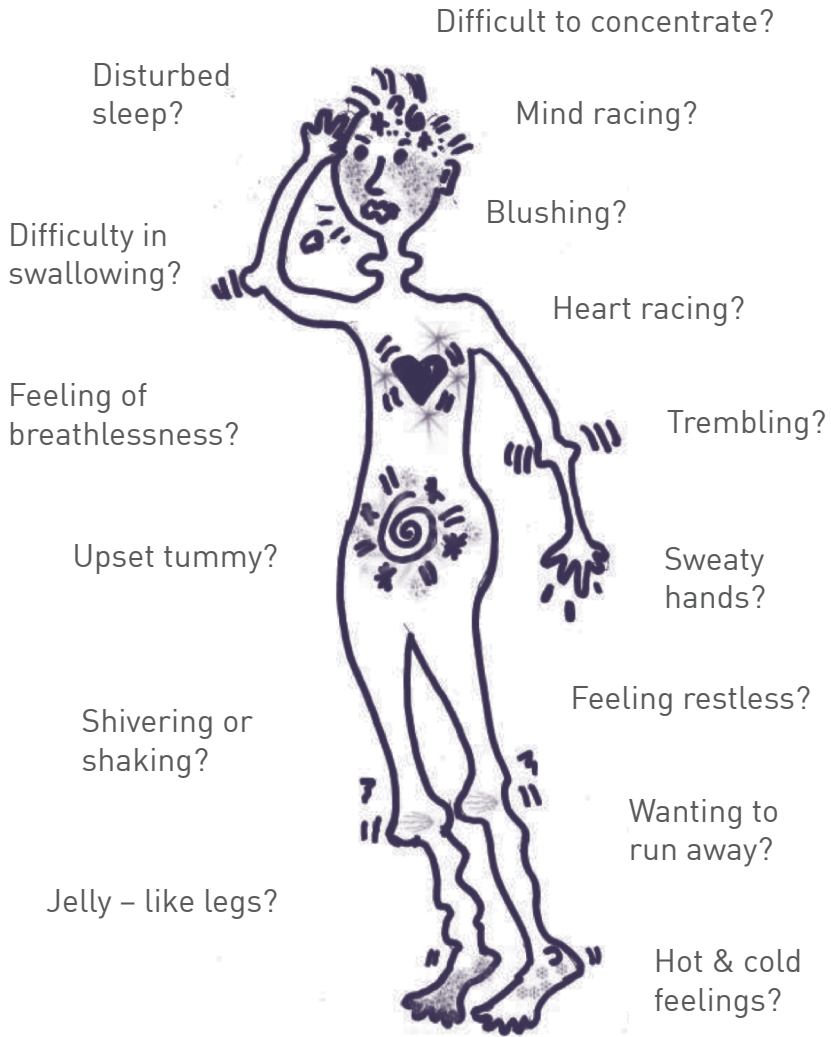
What is grief after a bereavement like?

You may have been told that everyone's grief is different and that there is no right or wrong way to grieve the death of your special person. This is true because your relationship with that person was unique to you- that is what made the relationship special, however, hearing that everyone's grief is different can cause you to worry about what you are thinking and feeling.

Although no two people will experience grief identically, grief can cause 'common reactions'; things that we know you are likely to feel in some way, depending on your circumstances.

Grief in the early days and weeks

The feelings and reactions that we have when we are first told that someone has died can be very different to what we feel later, especially if we did not expect them to die.



© Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust, 2012.

All rights reserved. Not to be reproduced in whole or in part without the permission of the copyright owner.

Common reactions that you are likely to have early on are:

- Feelings of shock, panic or disbelief
- Racing heart, feeling faint or breathless
- Feeling numb and emotionless
- Wanting to cry a lot and feeling overwhelmed by our emotions, especially fear and guilt
- Disturbed sleep
- Finding it hard to return to usual routines or unable to concentrate
- Feeling fearful and wanting to stay close to our family and home

These reactions can feel very intense and scary but are normal. They will gradually change over the first few days and weeks.

During this time the support we have from family, friends and school or college is important to help manage these intense reactions.

Things that can affect how you grieve

Several things can affect your grief, making some thoughts and feelings more frequent or intense; how the person died, how you found out, how important they were to you and the kind of relationship you had with them, how much you were able to be involved in the funeral arrangements, and, your religious or cultural beliefs.

When the death was expected

If the person has been unwell beforehand and you might have been prepared for the possibility that they may die and have begun to grieve beforehand. You might have experienced difficulties with feelings of helplessness, guilt because you are well and they are not, and, anger that a cure for their illness is not available. You may have had difficulties managing feelings of fear and dread for a long time and worries about whether others, including ourselves, will become unwell. All of this may mean that you have more feelings of guilt and anxiety for a while. Sharing these thoughts and feelings with another trusted person can help you manage them better.

Sudden and unexpected deaths

If the death happened unexpectedly or suddenly this can have a big effect on our grief reactions in the early days and the way we grieve afterwards. You are likely to experience more feelings of shock with reactions such as shivering, racing heart, breathlessness, sleeplessness, mind racing or being unable to think. You might find it hard to hear and understand what is being said to you. This is part of your body's fight/flight/freeze response after something dangerous has happened; your body releases lots of adrenalin to make this happen. The good news is that these feelings are not permanent but can feel very scary when they happen.

Sudden death, suicide and death by Covid-19 can cause greater feelings of shock, panic and regret because you were not able to prepare for the death. You may not have been able to visit them and this can cause more anxiety or additional complex feelings.

Cruse has some information on their website about this:

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/trauma>

To find out more about what anxiety is, and things that you can do to manage it visit:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/>

<https://nopic.org.uk/youth-hub/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>

How close you were to them

The person who died was special to you and perhaps also you had a special relationship with them because they were your parent, brother or sister. In these cases it may mean that there are many other changes that happen after the bereavement that can affect how you are able to grieve. Sometimes the bereavement can cause changes in where you live, who takes care of you and where you go to school. In these circumstances it can make grieving more difficult and you may want or need extra support to be able to do this.

Check out **How to find extra help** at the end of this guide

Religious and cultural beliefs

There are many different religious, spiritual and cultural belief in the UK today. Many of them have important beliefs about what happens to people when they die, how we can remember them and the meaning and purpose of life.

It may be helpful for you to talk about the beliefs and any questions that you have with your family, spiritual leaders or community so that they can provide reassurance and explanations. This will help you have comfort and encouragement in your grief.

How much you were able to, or chose to, be involved in the funeral

Funerals and funeral rituals play very important roles in all cultures and religious beliefs in the ways that we mourn the person who died. In some cultures young people are very much included in these, and, in others they are not. Some families in the UK believe that children and young people will not want or need to take part in the funeral or could not cope with the emotions that funerals cause.

However, most young people say that they would have liked to be able to choose whether to attend and how they could take part. Attending a funeral can help you understand the reality of what has happened and give a chance with others to say goodbye. Funerals often provide opportunities for families to come together and talk about the person who died, swapping memories and giving thanks for their life. Without this, it can hold up the grieving process for some people.

In early 2020, because of Covid-19 restrictions, funerals are taking place in a very different way in the UK. Changes include restricting the number of people able to be at the funeral to only very close family members, or holding funerals with only funeral staff present. Some funerals are being live-streamed so that you can take part at a distance. There are many other ways that you can create a memorial and find meaningful ways to say goodbye and give thanks for their life.

Down to Earth has some suggestions of what you can do to make the funeral meaningful if you cannot attend. Maybe you can think of some that are special to your person.

<https://quakersocialaction.org.uk/we-can-help/helping-funerals/down-earth/coronavirus-organising-meaningful-funeral/if-you-cannot>

Grieving during Coronavirus lockdown

Since late March 2020 everyone in the UK has been directed by the government to observe special lockdown procedures that means that all people have to practice social distancing, avoid all unnecessary travel and stay at home. Schools and colleges, shops and businesses have also closed and everyone has become reliant on the internet for many more things. Although this will not be permanent it has had a major effect on all areas of our lives.

This makes grieving more difficult because we cannot easily access support from friends or schools and we are unable to use familiar routines and activities to help us take time out from our grief. Even if the death was not caused by Coronavirus it will affect many of the things that we can take for granted that happen after a bereavement.

Because families are unable to be with each other in the same ways as before, it will be harder to get comfort and support from each other in the same ways. Here are some suggestions that might help during social distancing and lock down.

- Understand that these are exceptional circumstances and we have not let our loved one down because we cannot do things in the way that we would have done before Coronavirus.
- Think of ways that you can use social media and the internet in good ways to keep in touch with family members and share thoughts, memories and feelings.

- Take some time everyday to breathe fresh air in some way, practise breathing exercises and think about what advice your loved one would give you about how to cope.
- Think of ways that you can celebrate the life of your loved one after the coronavirus threat passes
- Consider making a donation to a charity in their memory
- Use the bereavement websites and helplines listed on page 9 to connect with other people who share the same experiences to help you feel less lonely.

Common emotions when we grieve

despair
 loneliness
 fear
 longing
 numbness
 confusion
 guilt
 regret
 anxiety
 sadness
 panic
 worry
 hope
 pain

Even though people grieve differently, the bereaved have told us of the common emotions that we often experience after someone has died. These can and will change and some will be more powerful than others at certain times like anniversaries, birthdays or other special times.

These websites can give you more explanation and ideas to help you manage your emotions:

Grief Encounter- Young People

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/young-people/>

Hope again

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk> at Cruse Bereavement Care

Help2makesense

<https://help2makesense.org> at Winston's Wish

Common reactions later on

After the first few weeks your grief reactions will change. Some feelings and thoughts will return more than once.

These can include:

- Missing the person and longing to be near them
- Worries because you don't understand enough about what has happened or being able to remember them
- Difficulties managing strong emotions and confusing thoughts when you think of the person or how they died
- Feeling more fearful and worried than before, especially for the safety of other family members
- Feeling angry about what has happened and become more easily frustrated even by small things
- Worrying about your health and the future
- Wanting to understand what you think might have happened to your loved one now, understand your spiritual beliefs better and why we think this has happened to us
- Difficulties sleeping and having nightmares
- Not wanting to do the same things as before or keep up friendships
- Difficulties managing schoolwork deadlines and other pressures



What can help you to manage your grief?

Grief can affect people differently and there is no right or wrong way to grieve but we know that there are some things that can help us to work through our grief.

This wheel can help you to think about what would help you to be able to manage your grief. There are some more explanations of each section on the following pages.

Why not show this guide to someone close to you to talk about what they can do to help you? You can show it to parents, family members and teachers.

It can be useful to help start conversations that could help them understand what your grief is like for you.

More about what can help you work through grief

Carrying on with familiar routines and activities

When someone dies a lot of things can change suddenly and your emotions can feel out of control. Having familiar routines, doing activities and hobbies like before, and keeping in touch with friends, especially in the earlier days can be very helpful to you. It is important to have time out from your grief to relax and do other things because grief can be physically and emotionally exhausting.

Having support and understanding from people around you

Having support and understanding from people around you is the best thing that can help you to grieve. You may want to have support from some members of your family but worry about upsetting them. You cannot make it worse for them by telling them how it is affecting you. If you do not feel able to ask them for help other family members or staff at school can be a big help too.

If you want someone to talk to right now why not text the Winston's Wish 24/7 crisis messenger service (Text WW to 85258) or visit Hope Again or Help2makesense.




Clear, accurate, understandable information

We all have lots of questions after someone has died and need good information about what has happened to help us manage fears and worries and to know that it was not our fault. Why not keep a record of your questions as you think of them to help you talk with parents, carers or health professionals about how to get the answers you need? There may be some questions that nobody knows the answer to but those that you feel comfortable talking with can help you to accept that some things cannot be explained or are beyond our control.



Having opportunities to talk about difficult thoughts and memories

Sometimes after someone dies we have bad memories about what has happened, or thoughts about what we imagine has happened. It can be hard to understand them and to manage the effects they cause. Talking about these memories with someone is important to help you know whether your memories are accurate or not, and to help the brain make sense of them. Until it is able to do this it can get stuck causing irrational fear and anxiety, nightmares and sleep problems.




Help to recognise your emotions and express them well

Although everyone's grief is different there are many common feelings we experience. Understanding these can help reassure you that you are not going mad or are bad for feeling these things. Talking to someone that you trust and who listens to your worries cannot make the person who died come alive again, but it can help you feel understood, and help you understand yourself and what you are feeling and find ways to manage those feelings well.



Help to strengthen memories of your loved one

It is normal to worry that we may lose our memories of the person who died. Memories are the way we feel connected to the person we love; making a memory jar, box or book can be an important way to rehearse and strengthen memories and help you keep memories strong. Photos, special objects, perfumes, music and other mementoes can all be included in these and become a way for you to talk to family and friends about the person who died.



Understanding what has happened as part of your whole life story

After a bereavement it can be easy for us to lose sight of lots of good things about life and it can be hard to believe that things will get better. As time goes by you may have a chance to think about this differently. What has happened to you will always be an important part of your history but thinking of it as a part of your whole life can help make it feel less overwhelming.

Thinking about the kind of inspiration your loved one has given you by their personality or how they lived their life, and how that can help you now will help you still feel connected to them. You can think about the legacy that they left you because of what you learned from them.



Renewed hope and plans for the future

Although things feel very bad right now this will not always be the case and it is good to remind ourselves about our ambitions and the things we would like to do in the future.

Sometimes it can be good to think about how proud our loved one would be of our plans, ambitions and what we can achieve. This can help make what we do at home, school, college and later life feel more meaningful and positive. It will help us feel more confident, building courage and determination for the future.

Who can help you to manage your grief?

People close to you

The most important people who can help you to grieve are family; especially parents or carers. However, your loss may be that of your parent or carer or they may be grieving too and in the early days it may be difficult for them to do this as you would like. Other members of the family such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, close family friends etc., can be good to talk to. Whoever is supporting you, perhaps you can show them this guide and discuss it together?

People at school or college

Staff at school or college can be a big help after a bereavement. If you can, speak to someone that you find easy to talk to. They can help by arranging to help manage any difficulties getting into school or completing schoolwork after the bereavement. They can also help by letting other staff know that for a time you may need extra help and support. They may be able to arrange to be the person in school / college that you can rely on for support when things are tough for you.

If you find it hard to begin to talk to a member of staff about this perhaps you can email them or send them a note asking for their help.

Friends

Sometimes it can be difficult to explain to friends what is happening to you. Showing this guide to them can also help them to understand and know how to help. Perhaps together you can make a list of things that between you, you can do to help you. Perhaps they can help you make a 'first aid kit' of things that help you to feel better when you are having a bad day.

How you can find extra help?

Even though there are things that you, your family and friends can do to help you to manage your grief, sometimes you might need a little extra help. Counsellors and trained bereavement workers can help if you are having difficulties with some of the things mentioned earlier, or if you don't have people close to you who can support you as you need.

If you can talk with someone in your family, doctor or trusted person in school or college they can help you think about what other support might be helpful.

Bereavement support online

There are ways to get support online from organisations that specialise in helping bereaved young people. These are sites created by young people, for young people so you may find them very helpful because you can find out what other young people feel. They also have helplines with people to chat to.

Hope again

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk>

Cruse Bereavement Care young people's website and helpline

Help2makesense

<https://help2makesense.org>

Winston's Wish support for young people, helpline and Crisis Messenger

Grief Encounter

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/young-people/>

Helpline support for young people

Hope Support Services - help for young people after

Coronavirus<http://www.hopesupport.org.uk>

Other helpful sites that have trained people for you to talk to are:

KOOTH

<https://www.kooth.com>

Free, confidential online support for all your worries

Childline

<https://www.childline.org.uk>

or call 0800 1111

Emergency Support

It is important to seek help if you are worried about yourself in any way or need help in a crisis. These organisations can help and are available 24/7

Winston's Wish Crisis Messenger

<https://www.winstonswish.org/crisis-messenger/>

TEXT WW to 85258

Young Minds Crisis Messenger Service

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/get-urgent-help/>

TEXT YM to 85258



Integrated Health and Care Commissioning Team,
Hertfordshire County Council, hertsjct@nhs.net

Content correct as of 17.04.2020