

## How to help others?

- Just listen
- Provide welcoming and non judgemental environments
- Check in on friends and colleagues
- Inform peers and colleagues about information, campaigns and services
- Don't feel like you have to have all the answers



 **mind** Havant and East Hants

## Contact us

Havant and East Hants Mind  
Leigh Park Community Centre  
Dunsbury way, Havant,  
Hampshire, PO95BG  
02392498916  
info@easthantsmind.org  
www.easthantsmind.org  
Charity No: 116301



 **mind** Havant and East Hants

## Bereavement



At HEH Mind we work to promote good mental health within our locality. We seek to support and empower people to lead a full life as part of their local community. Our services include

- Adult wellbeing
- Family wellbeing
- Children and young peoples wellbeing
- Training and workplace wellbeing
- Advocacy
- Volunteering
- Anti stigma/ discrimination campaigning
- Fund and awareness raising

HEH Mind services and support are available across the Havant Borough and East Hampshire District, including areas such as: Hayling Island, Waterloooville, Emsworth, Petersfield, Alton, Bordon and Bentley. Further details regarding the services at HEH Mind can be found in our 'About us' booklet.

## How can other people help?

### **Talk about the person who died**

When a person dies it can feel like they are erased from people's memories. While we may fear that talking about the deceased person will just bring up painful feelings, many people actually appreciate the opportunity to talk a bit about the memory of the person, finding this a comfort and a way of integrating the memory of the person who has died into their life, rather than pushing memories away. "What's your favourite memory of [the person who has died]?" or "Tell me about a time [the person who has died] made you laugh" can be useful.

### **Focus on the bereaved person**

Try to keep the focus on the bereaved person rather than coming back to our own feelings about the loss. Unless you have your own experience of bereavement it may not be helpful to make comparisons with our own experiences.

### **Help them seek additional support**

Supporting someone who is bereaved can be hard work and it is worth exploring what other options for support are out there. If they are ready and interested, help them explore additional support options.

## How can other people help?

Death and loss can be difficult to talk about and many people struggle to know what to say when trying to support someone who has been bereaved, even if they are a close family member or a good friend.

We may want to help but worry about saying 'the wrong thing'. Here are some ideas of how we might be able to support somebody after a loss.

### Acknowledge the loss and don't avoid contact

It is understandable to feel uncomfortable speaking about death or other losses, or to worry we might say the wrong thing, but staying silent or not contacting somebody after their bereavement can often make feelings of isolation and sadness worse. Reaching out to the bereaved person so that they know we are available to talk and listen if they would like to can be incredibly helpful.

### Consider how best to be in contact

There are different ways to grieve and there are different ways to communicate after a loss too. Receiving text messages may be easier for somebody to manage than returning calls. Dropping in to see them in person may be welcome for some but may be an inconvenience for others. It is worth asking the person what they'd prefer rather than making assumptions.

### Focus on listening

Try to respect what the bereaved person is choosing to share and focus on listening rather than finding out more. Give the bereaved person space to open up if they want to, while also being sensitive if they would rather not take it further.

## Bereavement

Losing someone important to us can be emotionally devastating; whether that be a partner, family member, friend or pet. It is natural to go through a range of physical and emotional processes as we gradually come to terms with the loss.

Bereavement affects everyone in different ways, and it is possible to experience any range of emotions. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Feelings of grief can also happen because of other types of loss or changes in circumstances, for example:

- the end of a relationship
- the loss of a job
- moving away to a new location
- a decline in the physical or mental health of someone we care about



# Different types of grief

In addition to the feelings of grief that you will experience following a loss, there are also other types of grief that you may experience at different times during bereavement.

## Anticipatory grief

Anticipatory grief is a sense of loss that we feel when we are expecting a death. It features many of the same symptoms as those experienced after a death has occurred, including depression, extreme sadness or concern for the dying person. It does not necessarily replace, reduce or make grief after the loss any easier or shorter, but for some people it can provide the opportunity to prepare for the loss and for what the future might look like.

## Secondary loss

After any loss you may also feel what is known as 'secondary loss'. After the initial shock of losing a loved one you may struggle when thinking of future experiences that those people will not be there to share or see, such as watching your children grow up, meeting partners or attending key life events like weddings.

Cruse Bereavement Care's website has information on coping with anniversaries and reminders of your loved one when you are bereaved—[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

# Helping ourselves

Coping with the loss of a loved one is always difficult, especially when it is not expected. It can take time to understand our feelings and adjust after the loss has happened, but there are things we can do help ourselves cope. For example, it can help to:

- Understand the grief process
- Connect with others
- Talk to a Therapist
- Look after our wellbeing



## Losing a pet

For some of us, losing a pet can feel like losing a close family member and can trigger grief and sorrow in the same way. Pets provide companionship, emotional support and unconditional love during the time they share with us and losing this can cause great sadness, especially if we are someone who has a strong bond with animals or if our pet is a key companion.

Some people don't have pets or see this type of loss as very different to losing a person. However, the significance of a loss is very personal and varies according to context and the meaning that the particular relationship had for us, and so it is important not to make assumptions about what is 'normal' when supporting someone who has lost a pet.

No matter what the type of loss, there are organisations and people offering support and advice.

Please check the Blue Cross website ( [www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)) for information on their pet bereavement support service.



## Is grief a mental health problem?

In most cases, grief is not a diagnosable mental health problem. It is absolutely normal that grief places strain on our everyday lives and it can take a long time to adapt to life after a loss. Even after a long period it is still normal to experience days like the difficult early days after a bereavement, but over a period of time we gradually learn to manage these.

However, sometimes people experience such strong feelings of grief long after a bereavement happens that a diagnosis of complicated grief is made. These experiences of bereavement can be very similar to 'simple grief' except that, rather than becoming manageable in the long-term, they can worsen and affect your day to day living for a long time.





# What does grief feel like?

Grief can be difficult and stressful and nearly everybody goes through it at some point in their lives. Despite this, it can be very difficult to predict how we might react to a loss, as it is a very individual process. After a loss we may experience any of the following:

## **Sadness or depression**

This can be brought on at the realisation of the loss and may cause us to isolate ourselves whilst reflecting on things we did with our loved one or focusing on memories from the past.

## **Shock, denial or disbelief**

It is natural for our minds to try to protect us from pain, so following a loss some of us may find that we feel quite numb about what has happened. Shock provides emotional protection from becoming overwhelmed, especially during the early stages of grief, and it can last a long time.

## **Numbness and denial**

We may feel numb after a loss. This is natural and helps us to process what has happened at a pace that we can manage, and not before we are ready. It is natural and can be a helpful stage - the only problem being if numbness is the only thing we feel, and none of the other feelings associated with grief, as this can cause us to feel 'stuck' or 'frozen'.

# What does grief feel like?

## **Panic and confusion**

Following the loss of someone close to us we can be left wondering how we will fill the gap left in our lives, and can experience a sense of changed identity.

## **Anger or hostility**

Losing somebody is painful and can seem an unfair thing to happen. We may feel angry or frustrated and want to find something or someone to blame for the loss, so we can try to make sense of it.

## **Feeling overwhelmed**

Grief can hit us immediately and with full force, potentially causing us to cry a lot or feel like we are not coping. We can worry our feelings are so overwhelming that we don't know how we can live with them. But over time feelings of grief tend to become less intense and we do find ways to live with them.

## **Relief**

We may feel relieved when somebody dies, especially if there had been a long illness, if the person who died had been suffering, if we were acting as the main carer for the person, or if our relationship with the person was difficult. Relief is a normal response and does not mean we did not love or care for the person.

## **Mixed feelings**

All relationships have their difficulties and sometimes we think because our relationship with the person was difficult, that we will grieve less or cope better. Instead we can find we have a mix of emotions like sadness, anger, guilt and anything in between.