



These things are normal when you are grieving





and these also ...





The Very Personal Experience of Grief

Everyone grieves in their own unique way. Grief doesn't come with an instruction manual. It is a powerful emotional process and will stay with you for as long as it needs to. Sometimes grief is complicated, sometimes it is instantaneous and sometimes it is delayed. Let us start with explanations of terms that may crop up in conversations around you during this time.

Bereavement

Bereavement can be defined as any loss that affect us at a personal level. It can be the loss of a job, your home, death or any other kind of loss. It comes in many forms. This leaflet will focus on bereavement in relation to death. How we respond to the loss of someone we loved or were close to, will be influenced by many factors and they will be covered later in this leaflet.

Grieving

Is our emotional response to the sadness we feel when we have experienced a significant loss. This will vary in intensity depending on the severity of the loss.

Mourning

This term is less frequently used in current times, but this relates to the behavioural way that we express our grief. Mourning may be demonstrated through rituals we perform, the clothes we wear, and in some cultures, the prescribed periods of time for grief. So often in today's society we are 'hurried' through our grief and mourning. Virginia Ironside said how she longed for the days of the black armband when everyone knew you were mourning. The death of someone we love, who matters to us, is a shattering experience. Many books have been written on the subject by many in great authority but just as each one of us is unique, so will our journey through grieving be unique.

Two Useful Models

Faced with grief for the first time and beyond, can be daunting and overwhelming. It is not uncommon to think "how do I do this?" We often feel we have to "get it right" – whatever that means! Having a model that has been developed by people who have worked extensively in this field can sometimes (not always) help us to understand what is happening to us in the moment. Two useful models are:

The Five Stages of Grief by Kubler-Ross

Four Tasks of Mourning by Worden



Kubler-Ross model

Following intense studies of the dying, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross formulated a model through which a dying or bereaved person may pass. She relates those to 'stages':

- Stage 1: Denial ... no, not me
- Stage 2: Anger... why me?
- Stage 3: Bargaining ... making a deal
- Stage 4: Depression ... withdrawal and a sense of loss
- Stage 5: Acceptance ... the end of the struggle

Worden Model

Dr William Worden has studied many forms of grief and written several books on the subject. Worden proposes that there are four tasks that must be accomplished for "the process of mourning to be completed" and "equilibrium to be re-established":

- Task 1: To accept the reality of the loss
- Task 2: To work through the pain of grief
- Task 3: To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing
- Task 4: To find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life

Both Kubler-Ross and Worden stipulated that grief is a very personal experience and not everyone will go through these stages/tasks or even go through them in the order they are presented. Remember, while understanding the various stages/tasks may be useful, it is important to grieve in your own natural way.

How someone grieves will depend on their relationship with the person who has died and that may be a parent, a sibling, a partner, a friend or a child. Inevitably relationships with each will be different and it naturally follows that the feelings of grief will be different too.

Similarly, the way the person died can affect how we grieve. There is no right way or right time to lose someone we love.

Loss of a Partner/Spouse

When we lose our partner, the person we've shared our lives with has gone and there is a sense of half of us is missing.



Our grief process will be influenced by several factors, if there are children, the age of our partner, whether the death was expected or sudden, and many more.

Loss of a Sibling

The death of a brother or sister with whom we have grown up and perhaps shared many years is also a profound loss. Again, the process of grieving will be influenced by the relationship we shared.

Loss of a Parent

If we have enjoyed a close relationship with our parent this will be a painful and difficult time. Depending on our age at the time of death there may be complicating factors. Whatever the age or relationship, there will be a range of feelings and emotions to work through.

Loss of a Child

It is said that there is little worse than the death of a child...it's not the way things are meant to be. Parents may deal with the death in different ways, one may need to talk, the other may be unable to. If there are other children, they will need to be cared for too.

Death by Suicide

In addition to the range of experiences already mentioned, there are additional feelings present when we realise our loved one chose to end their life. We may feel bewildered, angry, guilty, shame and a sense of powerlessness.

Grief Responses that we all share

Whatever our relationship to the person who has died, there are some typical responses to grief. If you can relate to any of the things mentioned below, remember it is normal and emotionally healthy to feel, think and behave this way during your grief process.

Feelings

Shock Anger Numbness Bewilderment Yearning Anxiety Isolation
Loneliness Guilt Loss Vulnerability Helplessness Relief Sadness

Thoughts

Disbelief Denial Confusion Preoccupation Sense of presence

Physical Sensations

Dry mouth Weakness Hollowness in stomach Breathlessness Sense of
depersonalisation Lack of energy Tightness in the throat or chest
Hypersensitivity to noise



Behaviour

Sleep disturbance Searching and crying *Appetite disturbance*

Avoiding reminders of the deceased Dreams of the deceased Poor

Motivation Restless over activity Impaired memory and concentration *Social withdrawal* Visiting places to remind you of your loved one

“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning.

I keep on swallowing” (from C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed.)

Towards Recovery

Bereavement is a difficult, painful and bumpy journey. A broken heart doesn't heal in a month or two. A broken leg doesn't heal when the plaster comes off. It aches for several months before the healing is complete. In the same way our inner healing can take a lot longer than our outward smile may show. Bereavement is not something that you 'get over.' You get over an operation but even then, scars remain. A bereavement is woven into our lives and shapes the person we become. Our sorrow is absorbed bit by bit until in the end, healing comes. It does not come quickly ...but it will come. Help can come from caring friends who give you the space to just 'be.' They will walk alongside you in the difficult days. Learn to reach out to the right people and ask for what you need. Even if you don't know what you need, just seeking the company of a good friend can help. Family members may also be dealing with their own grief and you or they may avoid sharing thoughts and feelings in order to protect them or to avoid upsetting them. Try to open up and share your experiences, accepting there will be differences in each person's way of grieving and that, is okay. We can all learn from each other if we remain open and curious.

Professional help

It is important to recognise that grief is not an illness and, in most cases, does not require medical attention. The best recovery from bereavement will be when you can go through the stages. There is no short cut. It is painful. Talking to a Counsellor can help as they will walk alongside you and shine a torch in the darkness. They will help you come to terms with the reality of the loss, to be with you as you experience the pain of grief and to adjust to a life where your loved one is missing. Healing and recovery will come ... just not as soon or as quickly as we would like.



Useful links:

www.cruse.org.uk

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/dealing-with-grief-and-loss/>

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereaved-family-friends/dealing-grief/grieving-your-way>

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/at-the-end-of-life/coping-with-bereavement/symptoms-of-grief.html>

https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/grief-and-loss/?gclid=EAlalQobChMIxt6E54e84wIVCEPTCh2j8g0UEAMYASAAEglh2vD_BwE

https://www.themix.org.uk/mental-health/looking-after-yourself/grief-and-bereavement-6290.html?gclid=EAlalQobChMluNXI3Ym84wIVBbTtCh2RMAzaEAAYAiAAEgIVlvD_BwE

https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/your-feelings/common-feelings/?gclid=EAlalQobChMlm_C8iYq84wIVQ4fVCh014wICEAAYAiAAEgldCfD_BwE

https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/?gclid=EAlalQobChMlrOiopeq84wIVyrHtChlp8Q-dEAAYASAAEgLLdvD_BwE

<http://www.sane.org.uk/home>