
Understanding Bereavement and Loss



**a booklet for
young people**

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Bereavement and Loss - a booklet for young people

Introduction

Young people seem to have more than their fair share of “normal” problems in their lives as they progress from childhood to adulthood - without the additional devastation brought about by loss and/or bereavement. However, many young people do suffer this extra trauma and this booklet has been written with you in mind.

As well as offering understanding and reassurance in dealing with different aspects of this complicated subject - such as taboos surrounding death in our society and the feelings that grief brings with it - it is hoped that you will find it a source of practical help too. There is a list of other books as well as organisations to help at the back of the booklet.

What is Loss ?

Loss... is losing someone or something you really loved and treasured and it brings with it a great sadness. Life is full of losses. You do not have control of the world, unexpected things will happen and will affect you. Everyone learns this gradually and often painfully. When you are young you don't expect loss, you are not prepared for it. Death is one loss and is always shocking no matter how expected it is or how long it has been coming. Death is not expected at this time in your life. It makes you feel different from your friends, interferes with usual activities and places a burden of feelings, expectations and responsibilities on your shoulders that you are perhaps not ready for.

No two people are the same. How they feel is different. How they act or react is different. Look at the difference in size and shape in your group of friends. Therefore, the feelings of loss and the pain of grief will be different for each person.



It's a scary, confusing time with lots of pressures from home, friends and school. To have to deal with the pain of grief is very hard but this gives you an opportunity to grow emotionally.

Grief is what you feel when you have experienced a loss and there are lots of losses you will experience in life - like losing your first teeth, changing school, feeling left out, lonely, and different.

Grief is the price we pay for loving. Some experiences hurt a little and some hurt a lot. A pain like no other pain, it stops you living and puts you down - trapped in a dark hole - you can feel that you are going mad.

Death, mourning and grief involve feelings of helplessness and lack of control which are very difficult to cope with. You are at the stage in life when you need to feel powerful and in control and this can make it very hard to give way to the feelings of grief. There is not enough time, energy or inner strength to cope with everything.

The taboo of death

A survey in the 1970's showed 98% of people had not discussed the topic of death with friends. Our society is not very good at talking about death and usually it is avoided with an attitude of "it won't happen to me". Therefore many people are totally unprepared for what happens.

You may be asked whether you want to see the body of the person who has died. You must make your own decision and not let anyone force you into this. Some people find that seeing the body makes them feel that the person that they once knew is no longer there and that it is only a body - not a person. It can be upsetting and shocking to see someone, once so vibrant and full of life, now lacking vitality. For some people seeing the body can be very comforting, a physical sign that the soul has left the body and gone elsewhere.

The funeral is an important ceremony. It is important that you are allowed to choose whether to attend or not. Some adults may try to protect you by suggesting that you don't go but you must decide for yourself. The funeral is often seen by those who loved a person as a final chance to say goodbye. It can help to spend valuable time with family and friends focusing on the person and sharing your collective sense of grief.

Talking about the dead person can be easy for some or the hardest thing of all. Try to take some time to remember the good things, talk about them with friends and relatives. Laughing together about the things you enjoyed and loved in the person who died is important.

The process of grief

Grief is OK and grieving is an important part of coming to terms with a death or other loss.

Doctors and therapists who work with people who are grieving reckon there are separate stages to grieving.

1. **Shock** - is the first response to death. It can bring different reactions - from total collapse to withdrawal. This can be a very lonely time as the adults around you get on with the practical things like organising the funeral.
2. **Denial and isolation** - it can't be true! This is often experienced by adults and children in the early days of their bereavement. They know that their loved one is dead, may have seen the body, but they cannot believe that s/he is not around.

3. Growing awareness

- a) **Searching** - you have lost something and try to find it. The fact they you cannot find it can build up inside as a huge fear. This searching and realising that you cannot find the person helps you come to accept that you will never be with them again in this life.

You may feel terrified of losing other people and things.

- b) **Despair** - this may follow the searching. It is often during this time that some young people find it very difficult to attend school.
- c) **Anger** - You may feel anger towards the person who has died for leaving you, or anger at god who has taken them away from you. Real fury may show itself in hitting out, shouting, stealing or breaking things rather than in words.



You may feel able to express your anger in words. A lot will depend on whether you feel your feelings will be accepted by the adults around you. It is important to express your anger in ways that do not hurt yourself or anyone else.

d) Depression - this includes feeling worried, fearful and guilty.

These feelings can become very muddled up. All together they can lead to feeling very low and depressed. This stage of grief can almost seem too much to bear.

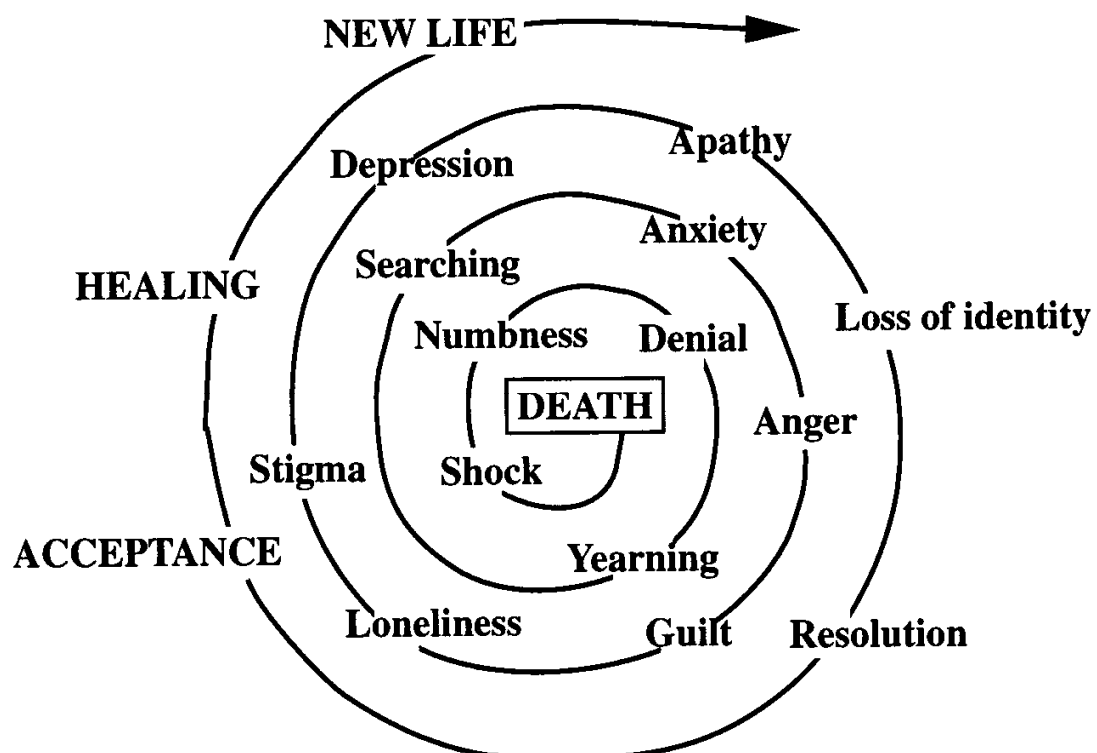
You may find your mind filled with worries about practical things such as “will we be able to go on holiday?” “Who’ll give me my pocket money and help me with my homework?” “Will I still be able to go to college?”.

During this stage it is usual to experience feelings of emptiness and the pain of the loss.

4. Acceptance - at this stage you may be able to talk more happily about the loss and can settle into new circumstances and regain a greater interest in life.

One way of looking at grief

The process of grief following bereavement.



Grief does not pass smoothly from stage to stage or feeling to feeling but moves backwards and forwards sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. You may find that you do not experience all the feelings described here. Another way of describing how you are feeling, is; there are good days and some bad days, good and bad times.

How long will I feel like this?

How long is a piece of string?

It varies a lot, except that if you ask someone who has gone through the same thing they will say that time heals.

“You won’t forget but you will get over it” - Paula

“Grief becomes easier to bear as time passes” - Janette

Two years is not a long time for this to take and many young people may grieve over a death for longer than two years. It is important to give yourself time to grieve and not try to hurry it along. There is not a set timetable for grief. Feelings and emotions can be very mixed up, like a maze.

Many problems that people have later in their lives are to do with deaths not being properly grieved for at the time. Grief is frightening but it is very important to let yourself experience it, otherwise feelings can be bottled up inside - waiting to come out later on in your life.



*“People are often lonely
because they build walls
instead of bridges”*

- Joseph Newton

Young people often put off their own grief in order to help those around them. Try not to do this as you may find that by the time you come to your grief, others have moved on and you may be alone in your grief.

The feelings of grief

As described above, grief brings many different, often confusing feelings. You may have great swings of feelings, great sadness sleeplessness and confusion. All these feelings are normal.

After a funeral service life goes back to normal for most people but if you were very close to the person who died life may not go back to normal. This period of time can be very hard and not made easy by other people's avoiding you and being embarrassed. Even close friends can run out of sympathy.

Feeling different from other people your age can make friendships difficult. You may be afraid of other people dying and have other fears and friends can find this difficult to understand.

The change in your life and the extra stress can lead you to feel worried, fearful and tense. Here are a few simple ways to deal with your feelings:

- * talk to someone - share it, others will welcome your trust
- * write about it - helps you see it in a different light
- * deep breathing and relaxation- helps to calm your thoughts
- * sort it - make a list of ways that will help you
- * delay it - put it on hold until you have set a special time to deal with it.
- * draw, write, compose music about your feelings. Some people write, draw or compose something for the person who has died and keep it in a very safe place
- * exercise
- * if there is something you wish you'd said to the person who has died it can be helpful to write this down, or imagine that they are sitting in front of you and say it out loud.
- * angry feelings can be expressed through stamping, tearing, running, punching a pillow.



You may feel frightened by how intense your feelings are and may believe that you will never get over it or be normal again. These are normal fears. You will be changed by grief but you will be able to feel OK again and get on with your life.

Coping with guilt - not something else to feel guilty about

Guilt is one of the most difficult feelings to deal with. You may feel guilty because you are angry. Blaming yourself, regretting things you said or did, wishing you had done things differently is very normal. Be kind to yourself. Try to understand why you behaved the way you did and accept that it has happened now. It is done. You are a human being and not perfect.

If you have lost a brother or sister or been involved in a disaster you may experience survivor guilt (feelings that you should have died instead). This is a normal response to this situation and you may find yourself trying to take on the role of the dead person in an effort to fill the gap for your parent/s. You are loved for yourself and will not be loved any the less for being the one who didn't die. Try not to punish yourself for this. It is not your fault. Things you can do to help lighten up:

- * laugh - the best medicine
- * think positively - talk to yourself
- * win through it - imagine how you will feel in the end
- * escape it - notice something enjoyable around you.



The reactions of grief

When young people are grieving they may experience some of the following reactions. These are all normal reactions to loss:

- * Some young people feel unwell after a loss. For example you may experience aching limbs, have more colds, infections, head aches and stomach aches. This is more likely if the person who died was ill.
- * Some young people become more fearful. This can show itself in being reluctant to go to school, being fearful of the dark or of going out.
- * Sleep and eating difficulties are also common, such as having difficulty getting to sleep or having nightmares. Food can become important and some will over eat, while others will lose their appetite. These reactions should only last a short time. If you find that they go on for a long time, then it would be a good idea to seek some further help. People who can help are listed at the back of the booklet.
- * Some young people experience difficulties at school following a loss. It is normal to find it more difficult to concentrate and to feel more tired and lethargic. School work may suffer for a short while. Often because of feelings of anger, some young people become more difficult at home and school and may challenge adults more and be more aggressive. This booklet may be able to give you ideas of other ways of coping with your feelings, ways which will not hurt and upset others.
- * A bereaved young person may turn to other activities to try and shut out the pain, the confusion of their feelings and the sadness within the family. They may become engrossed in sports, clothes or music or turn to alcohol and other substances to help dull the pain. These latter ways of coping are not helpful in the long run and you will need to let others help you to find healthier ways of coping.
- * It is also normal to worry about your own death. Before this loss you may have already begun to think more about issues such as life and death. The death of someone close to you can cause a sense of confusion and meaninglessness, especially if the person was young.

Other members of the family



All the people in your family are individuals and their feelings and ways of coping can be different, as can their signs of stress and tension. Try to understand how other people in your family may be feeling. Try and share your feelings with them even if you think it is painful for them and you. There are likely to be changes in the family routine and the roles people play within the family to help adjust to losing the person and the roles they had.

Complications

Grieving can take up to 2 years and sometimes more than this. It can be made more difficult if:

1. You had a difficult relationship with the person who died. If this was the case you may feel more guilt as you remember all the times you didn't get on. You may feel guilty because there were moments when you felt glad they'd died.
2. The events surrounding the death are unclear, for example in a suicide or if the person dies in a traumatic event/disaster in which other people also died.
3. You have had other losses in the past or experienced trauma. This more recent loss may bring back feelings of fear and vulnerability that you had with past losses. These feelings can come back much stronger than expected and may take you by surprise.
4. You are not able to talk freely about your feelings and about the person who has died with family and friends. This may be because the death is seen as shameful by society, as often happens in the case of suicide. Or the death may not be recognised as such by society such as miscarriage and abortion. Maybe there is a lack of support because people have not been made aware of the death.

Other factors that may affect how you grieve

- * Your personality will affect how you grieve. Are you an optimistic or pessimistic type of person, do you think of yourself as strong or weak, someone in control or a victim. Some people find it hard to bear lots of confusing feelings and like to be in control of their emotions.
- * Your culture may also affect how you grieve personally and how your family and community demonstrate grief.
- * How the key adults and other supports in your life are grieving and expressing their grief can have a large impact on you. Make sure you talk to someone about any worries you might have about how they are coping and how this is affecting you.
- * Your gender - in our society boys are often taught to keep their feelings hidden and be “strong”. They may feel that it is not “manly” to be affected by grief. They do not cry as readily as girls - at least not in a public way and by bottling up their emotions, may, as a result, take longer to come to terms with the new situation. Fortunately, things are improving somewhat today; thanks mainly to many idols and heroes in the world of entertainment and sport, who are able to show that showing feelings in public is OK and the British “stiff upper lip” does not have to be the norm for boys and men.

Letting go and getting on

Sometimes it is good to ask yourself whether you are someone who is bereaved and grieving or someone who has been bereaved.

You can be in control, take the driving seat, then you will be free to live your life according to your own needs. Enjoy your sense of past, you are entitled to your past and your memories. Where you come from has shaped who you are now and what you are now.

Grieving is hard work but so is letting go of grief and getting on with life. Letting go of grief means having the courage to let go, overcoming the fear and accepting your loss. Love your memories now and live your life to the full.

Death, loss and grief is out there for all of us and is at the very centre of life; there is nothing more certain in life.

Contacts

Organisation	Tel No.	Website address
CHILDLINE National Helpline	0800 11 11	
SAMARITANS National Helpline Local Helpline	08457 90 90 90 0161 480 2222	www.samaritans.org
CRUSE <i>Bereavement Care</i> Local contact National Helpline National Youth line	0161 236 8103 0870 167 1677 0808 808 1677	Website for young people. www.rd4u.org.uk On this you can send emails and post messages. There is a leaflet to download.
GADDUM CENTRE <i>Bereavement counselling for Children & Families</i>	0161 834 6069	www.gaddumcentre.co.uk

Contacts at your local health centre:

- Your Doctor / General Practitioner. (The service is confidential.)
- The health visitor linked with your doctor. If you ask the receptionist at the health centre they will give you her name and telephone number or will leave a message.

Contacts in school

- The school counsellor
- The school nurse
- The Children & Young People's Directorate Psychology Service
Tel: 0161 474 3870
- Education Welfare Officer
Tel: 0161 474 2195

continued overleaf...

Contacts out of school

- INTO Health - health information line
Tel: 0161 429 7010
- Your local Citizen Advice Bureau
- Young Minds National Helpline
Tel: 0800 018 2138
Mon & Fri 10am-1pm; Tues & Thurs 1-4pm; Wed 6-8pm
- SOBS Helpline (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide)
Tel: 0870 241 3337
- Your religious leader
- Central Youth (youth counselling service)
Tel: 0161 480 9600
- Youthful Minds (offers support to young people)
Tel: 0161 477 1598
- Kooth.com (on-line counselling service)
<http://www.kooth.com>
- Beacon Counselling
Tel: 0161 - 440 0055 (24 hour answerphone)
- Child Bereavement Trust
Tel: 01494 678 088

Booklist

<i>Bunting, Eve</i>	A Sudden Silence
<i>Mellonie, Bryan</i>	Beginnings and Endings with Lifetimes Inbetween
<i>Goble, Paul</i>	Beyond the Ridge
<i>Hatfield, Jim</i>	Dead
<i>Haughton, Emma</i>	Dealing with Death
<i>Sanders, Pete</i>	Death and Dying
<i>Hathorn, Libby</i>	Grandma's Shoes
<i>Jukes, Mavis</i>	I'll See You in My Dreams
<i>Thompson, Colin</i>	Looking For Atlantis
<i>Lloyd, Errol</i>	Many Rivers To Cross
<i>Hill, David</i>	See Ya, Simon
<i>Klein, Robin</i>	Seeing Things
<i>Branfield, John</i>	The Fox in Winter
<i>Moon, Pat</i>	The Spying Game
<i>Walker, Alice</i>	To Hell With Dying
<i>Miller, William</i>	Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree
<i>Strachan, Ian</i>	Which way is Home?



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