



Introduction to Bereavement

On Your Side

We're Mind, the mental health charity. We've joined forces with the EFL as the official charity partner to use the power of football to improve the nation's mental health and wellbeing. That has never been as important as right now.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is affecting all our lives. Things are changing fast, and many of us are worrying about what it all means for ourselves and for our loved ones. Those of us already living with mental health problems are facing extra challenges too.

Our information resources are being updated regularly to access the most up to date information visit:

> mind.org.uk/coronavirus

Together, Mind & the EFL will:

- Raise awareness of mental health with fans, clubs and the wider public
- Raise funds to deliver life changing national and local support
- Help improve the approach to mental health in football working with other partners in the game

Find out more at mind.org.uk/football

Introduction to Bereavement

Together with the EFL, We're On Your Side.

This introduction provides information on bereavement, where to go for support, and suggestions for helping yourself and others through grief. This is adapted from Mind's [bereavement information pages](#)

What is bereavement?

Bereavement is the experience of losing someone important to us. It is characterised by grief, which is the process and the range of emotions we go through as we gradually adjust to the loss.

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's 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.

Are there 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 types 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.

How long does grief tend to last?

There is no time limit on grief and this varies hugely person to person. The time spent in a period of bereavement will be different for everybody and depends on factors such as the type of relationship, the strength of attachment or intimacy to the person who died, the situation surrounding their death, and the amount of time spent anticipating the death.

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 you may experience any of the following:

The pain doesn't vanish and we shouldn't have to hide it, especially from those closest to us.

- **Sadness or depression.** This can be brought on at the realisation of the loss and may cause you to isolate yourself whilst reflecting on things you did with your 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 people may find that they 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.** You may find that you 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'.

Grief is a fickle thing, and it hits you in ways that you aren't prepared for. I've always been a fairly confident person so the shift in my mental health that came with grief took me by surprise.

- **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. You may find that you feel angry or frustrated and want to find something or someone to blame for the loss, so that you can try to make sense of it.
- **Feeling overwhelmed.** Grief can hit people immediately and with full force, potentially causing them to cry a lot or feel like they are not coping. People can worry that their feelings are so overwhelming that they don't know how they can live with them. But over time feelings of grief tend to become less intense and people find a way to live with them.

- **Relief.** You may feel relieved when somebody dies, especially if there had been a long illness, if the person who died had been suffering, if you were acting as the main carer for the person, or if your relationship with the person was difficult. Relief is a normal response and does not mean you did not love or care for the person.
- **Mixed feelings.** All relationships have their difficulties and you may think that, because you had a difficult relationship with the person, that you will grieve less or cope better. Instead you may find that you feel a mix of emotions like sadness, anger, guilt and anything in between.

We can feel all, none or some of these things. There is no right or wrong way to feel following a loss. Some people seek help immediately by showing their emotions and talking to people, others prefer to deal with things slowly, quietly or by themselves.

See our pages on depression, anxiety and panic attacks and anger for more on these topics.

I have lost friends and family - each bereavement has been different but it has all been a learning process. It is crucial that people know where to turn to.

There are many different factors that affect grief, including the relationship we had with the person who died, our previous experience of grief, and the support we have around us.

Some other experiences you may have while you are grieving include:

- sleep problems
- changes in appetite
- physical health problems
- withdrawing from other people, or wanting to be with others all the time.

Different studies describe the stages of the grief cycle in slightly different ways, but the most common stages are:

- **Denial** - feelings of shock, disbelief, panic or confusion are common here. "How could this happen?", "It can't be true".
- **Anger** - blaming yourself, blaming others and hostility are all common feelings and behaviours - "Why me?", "This isn't fair", "I don't deserve this".
- **Depression** - feeling tired, hopeless, helpless, like you have lost perspective, isolated or needing to be around others - "Everything is a struggle", "What's the point?".
- **Bargaining** - feelings of guilt often accompany questions like "If only I had done more", "If I had only been...".
- **Acceptance** - acceptance does not mean that somebody likes the situation or that it is right or fair, but rather it involves acknowledging the implications of the loss and the new circumstances, and being prepared to move forward in a new direction.

These stages do not always appear in the same order for everybody, and some people experience some stages and not others. It is common to move forwards and backwards through the stages in your own way and at your own pace. Some people may experience grief outside of the cycle altogether.

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. This is sometimes called simple grief.

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.

Where can I get support?

There are a number of different organisations offering support for different types of bereavement. For example:

Cruse Bereavement Care – offers face-to-face, telephone, email and online support for anyone who has experienced a loss.

BEAD (Bereaved through Alcohol and Drugs) – provides information and support for anyone bereaved through drug or alcohol use.

Child Bereavement UK – provides support for anyone who has lost a child, and for children themselves who are bereaved.

Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity (SANDS) – provides information and support for anybody affected by the death of a baby.

The Compassionate Friends – offers a range of services supporting bereaved parents and their families.

Sudden – helps people who have experienced a sudden bereavement to access specialist information and advice.

Widowed and Young – offers support to people under 50 who have lost a partner.

If you have lost someone to suicide, see our information page on [bereavement by suicide](#) for more information and specific support options.

Self-care

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

If I knew then what I know now, I would have prioritised looking after my own needs.

How can I help myself?

Understand the grief process

- Grief can be painful and exhausting but most people find that in time things become easier. Understanding the grief process and the common stages of the grief cycle can be really helpful - so it can be a good idea to familiarise yourself with these and keep them in mind during the periods when difficult feelings come up. Learn your triggers, what helps you to cope. You could try creating a memory box.

Connect with others

- Let others know how you're feeling. Tell people what you find helpful and let them know when you are finding things difficult. It's okay to ask others to be with you if you need them.
- Seek support from one of the organisations listed or try peer support—it can be helpful to talk with others who are also currently coping with a loss or have experienced grief in the past.

Talk to a therapist

- Talking with a trained professional can help you become more aware of and address your thoughts and feelings following a loss. It can be useful to have a continuous focused source of support that goes beyond the level of support that friends or family may be able to provide. For information on talking therapies see our pages on [talking therapy and counselling](#). Cruse Bereavement Care also have a [local bereavement services directory](#), with some regions providing grief counselling.

Look after your wellbeing

- Get enough sleep. Learn how to relax before bed, making sure your bedroom is a calm place and as clear of distractions as possible. If you are having trouble sleeping, see our pages on coping with sleep problems.
- Eat well. Eating regular healthy meals can make a big difference to your overall sense of wellbeing. See our information on food and mood for tips.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol. Alcohol and drugs tend to make it difficult in the longer term for you to manage your feelings and find ways to help you to cope.

When I am absorbed in playing and creating it can distract me from the distress I still experience at times.

Supporting a friend or family member

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

I was shocked when friends didn't ask how I was doing. I felt invisible, as if I were standing there but they couldn't see me.

- **Acknowledge the loss and don't avoid contact.** It's understandable to feel uncomfortable speaking about death or other losses, or to worry that you 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 you 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.
- **Give them space.** Not wanting to spend lots of time with other people or feeling guilty at not acknowledging messages could be an additional burden for a grieving person, so it can be worth letting them know they can respond whenever they feel able, or simply send them a message to let them know you are thinking of them and that no response is needed. Adapting to life after a loss can take a long time and people should be allowed the space to process their emotions for as long as they need. It is useful if you can strike a balance between contacting them so that they do not feel isolated but also giving them space. Again, asking them what they need is a good idea.
- **Talk about the person who died.** When a person dies it can feel like they are erased from people's memories. While you 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 listening.** Try to respect what the bereaved person is choosing to share with you 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.
- **Focus on the bereaved person.** Try to keep the focus on the bereaved person rather than coming back to your own feelings about the loss.

Look after your wellbeing

Connect



Feeling close to, and valued by, people is a fundamental human need. Social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing and for acting as a buffer against mental ill health for people of all ages. Phone or video call a friend or pop a note to a neighbour. There are times we need to disconnect too—take a walk without your phone or turn off your notifications.

Be Active



Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety. Exercise is essential for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting wellbeing. It doesn't have to be intense—move more during the day, do something you enjoy.

Take Notice



Reminding yourself to 'take notice' can strengthen and broaden awareness. Being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your wellbeing. Savouring 'the moment' can help to reaffirm your life priorities. Focus on your breathing, take notice of the birds or think about 3 things you're thankful for.

Learn



Continued learning through life enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life. The practice of setting goals has been strongly associated with higher levels of wellbeing. Learn a new hobby, take time to complete the crossword or research something you've been wondering about.

Give



Research shows that giving makes you happier. People with a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy. Give a compliment, a smile or your thanks to get started.

*The Five Ways to Wellbeing: New Economics Foundation



We're all on your side

Wider support for either yourself or someone you know.



Support for someone in crisis

- GP or other health professional, 999 or A&E
- Samaritans: 116 123 (24-hour helpline) or > samaritans.org
- SHOUT Crisis Line text SHOUT to 85258.

Support from Mind

- Mind website & information resources: > mind.org.uk
- Mind Infoline: 0300 123 3393 (weekdays 9am - 6pm) or text 85463 or email info@mind.org.uk
- Mind Legal Line: 0300 465 6463
- Access peer support via Elefriends, our supportive online community. (elefriends.org.uk)
- Contact your Local Mind



Support from Football organisations

League Managers Association (LMA)

- Email: lma@leaguemanagers.com
- Phone: 01283 576350
- Website: leaguemanagers.com/member-services/mental-health/



Professional Footballers Association (PFA)

- 24/7 helpline: 07500 000 777
- Email: wellbeing@thepfa.co.uk
- Website: thepfa.com/wellbeing/mental-health-and-football



Please note that all information helplines are private and confidential

Together
we'll be
unstoppable

 **EFL**

 **MIND**

Find out more at mind.org.uk/football