

Life after death – grief

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Coming to terms with the death of a loved one affects people in different ways and very often takes time. If you are a close family member or a friend of someone who has died recently, you are likely to experience many conflicting emotions, especially if he or she had been ill or incapacitated.

People often have many questions about death but this is a tricky subject that many find it hard to talk about. This leaflet is designed to help you to understand the grieving process, reassuring you that what you are feeling is perfectly normal and will pass. It also directs you to sources of support and offers some useful tips on how to look after yourself during this difficult time.

At Canford Healthcare we have many years' experience of helping family and friends through those first difficult weeks and month after the death of a loved one in our care homes. It is always sad when we lose a resident – during their time with us they become a valued and much-loved member of our family. So, supporting their nearest and dearest is an important part of what we do.

When someone dies you may be the person who is responsible for dealing with the practicalities, alongside your grief. The other leaflet in the series, Life after death – the practicalities, is a simple guide to the most important administrative and legal steps that must be taken, whether or not you are the executor of the will.

Grief is the emotional suffering you feel when you lose someone you love and is a completely natural response to such a loss.

The emotional pain can seem overwhelming and you may experience all sorts of unexpected and powerful feelings – the greater and more significant your loss, the more intense these are likely to be. You may also experience physical symptoms of grief and have trouble eating or sleeping, for example.

Grieving is a highly individual process and there is no right or wrong way to do this. How you grieve depends on your personality, life experience, style of coping, faith and many other things. Sometimes people experience grief as a series of highs and lows which become shorter and less intense as time goes by.

The grieving process takes as long as it takes. It cannot be hurried and there is no standard timetable for when it can or should be over. For some people grief may last for years, whereas others may begin to feel better in just a few weeks. Sometimes, even years after a loss, particular events such as weddings or births can trigger a strong and sudden sense of renewed grief. At all times of the process, though, it is important to be kind to yourself.



The five stages of grief

The five stages of grief are commonly understood to be linked to the various emotions experienced during the grieving process. These were first identified by psychiatrist and author Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and are categorised as:

- **Denial** “This can’t be happening to me.”
- **Anger** “Why is this happening? Who is to blame?”
- **Bargaining** “Make this not happen, and in return I will ____.”
- **Depression** “I’m too sad to do anything.”
- **Acceptance** “I’m at peace with what happened.”

Each stage is a completely natural response to your loss, and you may even begin to experience some (or all) before the death of your loved one. However, contrary to popular belief, not everyone goes through every stage so, if you do not, that is normal too.

You may also find that you experience the stages of grief in a different order. So there is no need to worry that you do not feel what you ‘should’ at any point.

Dr Ross never intended the five stages of grief to be a rigid framework. In fact, she wrote:

“There is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grieving is as individual as our lives.”

The effects of grief can be broadly divided into emotional and physical symptoms. As with any part of the grieving process, remember that your response to grief will be totally your own, so you may not experience all these emotions. Grief is incredibly personal and whatever you are feeling is perfectly normal.

Emotional and mental symptoms

- **Guilt** It is common to feel regret or guilt about what you did or did not say or do before someone died. Many people feel guilty about not having done enough to prevent a death, even when there was nothing they could have done. Some people also have feelings of guilt over emotions they believe they should not feel, such as relief, when someone has died after a long, difficult illness.
- **Sadness** Profound sadness is one of the most common emotions following bereavement and is often experienced as a strong sense of emptiness, despair or loneliness. These feelings can result in a great deal of emotional upset and frequent crying.
- **Anxiety** Bereavement can trigger feelings of fear, helplessness and insecurity or even panic attacks. Facing life without your loved one, dealing with the responsibilities you face after their death or recognising your own mortality can all contribute to high levels of anxiety, especially immediately after a death.

- **Anger** Even if your loss is nobody's fault, it is common to feel anger, resentment and the need to blame someone – including yourself. Many people experience such emotions towards doctors, carers or any others responsible for their loved one's care, God – or even the deceased.

Canford Healthcare staff understand how death can affect people in different ways and we share the grief of bereavement when one of our residents dies. We develop close relationships with the people who come to live in our care homes, often becoming personal friends with them and their families. So we are always happy to talk to you, whether to share happy memories of your loved one or to help you to deal with your grief in other ways.



Physical symptoms

Grief can manifest itself in physical symptoms such as:

- vivid dreams
- difficulty sleeping
- exhaustion and fatigue
- loss of appetite
- nausea

It is important to recognise that these are normal reactions to grief and will pass, although this may take some time.

But if you are worried about how they are affecting you or someone else, or they are persistent, a chat with your GP is often a good starting point.



Whether your grief affects your appetite or sleep, or makes you feel as though you want to withdraw into yourself, it is important to look after yourself.

Be kind to your mind and body and remember that grief can take time to pass.

Beware of the temptation to turn to 'props' like alcohol, cigarettes or recreational drugs. These will not help you in the long run as they are highly addictive and will damage your health. Take medication only under the supervision of your GP.

Accept the help and support offered to you by family and friends. Even if you are normally the self-sufficient type, now is the time to lean on those who care about you. Many people will want to support you but might not know how to, so you can help them to help you by telling them what would mean most to you. This might be practical help with funeral arrangements and other practicalities relating to death, or simply providing a listening ear or a shoulder to cry on.

Grief can be a confusing and frightening emotion to deal with, so you may find that people are not sure what to say to you or how to react. But be reassured that if someone reaches out to you, it is because they care and want to help.

Talking helps, whether that is to friends and family, professional counsellors or services like Cruse Bereavement Care or The Samaritans. If your relative was a resident at a Canford Healthcare home, remember that our staff will always be happy to talk to you.

If you follow a religious faith, its customs surrounding death can be a huge source of support, as can your clergy or other members of your religious community.

You might also think about:

- joining a support group
- using social media to reach out to friends and support groups
- maintaining your hobbies and interests
- planning ahead for 'grief triggers' like anniversaries and holidays
- getting plenty of exercise

One of the most important things to remember is that how you experience grief is completely personal to you. It is important to accept your feelings, without judging yourself or feeling embarrassed. Do not let anyone else dictate to you how you should be feeling and, equally, try to avoid pushing yourself to 'get over it' before you are ready to move on.



Grief can make you want to withdraw from other people and retreat into yourself. But support from others is often vital to the healing process.

That does not mean that you always need to talk about your feelings with friends and family, especially if it makes you uncomfortable. Sometimes, just being around others can give you comfort.

If you feel that you (or someone you know) would benefit from professional help, there are a number of organisations that you could turn to:

Cruse Bereavement Care

With a network of 4,000 trained volunteers Cruse offers free, confidential telephone, email and website support to bereaved people.

You can call the helpline on 0808 808 1677 and check out **www.cruse.org.uk** for opening hours and other contact information.

Cruse's other website **www.hopeagain.org.uk** is specifically for children and young people who are coping with loss.

The Samaritans

The Samaritans offers free, confidential support 24/7 by telephone, email, letter or via a self-help app. Its purpose is to listen without judgement, help you work through what is troubling you and suggest specific organisations that can help if you need professional support or treatment.

You can call the Samaritans **FREE** on **116 123** or visit **www.samaritans.org**

Contact a Samaritan

If you need someone to talk to, we listen. We won't judge or tell you what to do.

Call us any time, day or night

Whatever you're going through, you can call us any time, from any phone for FREE.

Call 116 123 >

[Find out more about our helpline](#)

Write us an email

Sometimes writing down your thoughts and feelings can help you understand them better.

jo@samaritans.org >

Response time: It may take several days to get a response by email

[Find out more about our email service](#)

This leaflet is part of a series designed to help people understand more about how to cope when a loved one dies. It looks at the various physical and emotional symptoms of grief, how to manage these and where to go for further support at this very difficult time.

Visit our resource library for our other leaflets:
www.canfordhealthcare.co.uk/resource-library

We have used all reasonable care when compiling the information for this leaflet, however we cannot be held liable for any errors, omissions or advice/services provided by organisations mentioned in the leaflet.

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