

THE BEREAVEMENT  
**CENTRE**

Self Help  
**GUIDE**

Sponsored by **southern coop**



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## HELPING YOU on Your Journey

**W**hen someone dies you could experience a range of different emotions and it can be difficult to understand how to cope with the new situation you find yourself in. The Bereavement Centre understands how hard this time can be and recognises that you may need some extra support. Through our wealth of experience gained over the years from helping the bereaved we have put together a self-help guide full of information, tips on how to look after yourself, practical help as well as activities and further reading and references. We hope the guide will help you along your journey in some way.



# The Effects OF GRIEF

**y**ou may experience many different feelings, thoughts, physical sensations and behaviours when trying to cope with grief. The following exercise can help you identify some of the effects that you may be experiencing. Select the ones you regularly experience and try to think of a recent example:



## EMOTIONAL

- Sadness/Tearful
- Shock (Dazed)
- Frustration
- Anxiety/Fear
- Guilt/Sense of being punished
- Anger (Vengeful)
- Numbness
- Overwhelmed/Helpless
- Loneliness

Your example .....

## PHYSICAL

- Breathlessness
- Fatigue/Lack of energy
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Disturbed sleep
- Weakness in the muscles ('shakiness')
- Dry mouth/Urge to keep swallowing
- Pain (headaches, chest and muscle pain)
- Poor concentration
- Restlessness or over-activity



Your example .....



## THINKING PROCESS

- Confusion
- Sense of presence
- Forgetful
- Preoccupation
- Continually asking why?
- Continually thinking of 'what if' scenarios

Your example .....

## BEHAVIOURAL

- Social withdrawal
- Avoidance of reminders
- Not talking about the loss
- Dreams/Nightmares
- Searching or calling out
- Putting off practical arrangements

Your example .....



# The Grief JOURNEY



**A**lthough everyone mourns in different ways at different times, there are recognised stages of grief. Not everyone will go through them all, but the following are the most common. They do not necessarily come in this order, and they often overlap.



## 1. Denial

Denial may be your first reaction to the loss of a loved one. It is nature's way of letting in only as much as you can handle, acting as a defence mechanism from the immediate shock. Your mind refuses to accept what has happened in an attempt to reject the painful reality of grief.



## 2. Anger

Anger and resentment are common stages of grief. The anger is a need to find someone to blame for your loss. You may feel that the world feels cruel and unsafe, making you react with fear, anger and irritability to the most trivial happenings.



## 3. Bargaining

During this stage, you may wish that you could go back in time and bring your loved one back. You may continuously ask yourself 'what if' or 'if only' and promise significant life changes to reverse what has happened.



## 4. Depression

Feelings of depression can last for a long time and usually appear when you accept the reality of your loss, and react to it. Depression may take the form of crying bouts, tiredness, and disturbance of normal sleep rhythms, loss of interest in things around us, or loss of concentration.



## 5. Acceptance

This is the stage when you start to come to terms with, accept and adapt to your loss. You may still feel pangs of grief prompted by a photograph or a particular memory, but can begin to enjoy good memories too.

# RELATIONSHIPS and Family

**G**rief is not an individual experience and can affect relationships with both family members and friends. It is important to understand how other people close to you may be feeling at this time and how together you can help each other along this journey.

## WHEN A PARTNER DIES

- Talking about your partner, who they were, what they liked can help you heal. Others may also have memories to share.
- Some people may try and measure your healing by when you sort out the personal belongings and clothing of your loved one. Remember this is your journey and there is no right or wrong time to do this.
- Wait a while before making any big decisions e.g. moving house or changing jobs to allow yourself time to think things through.
- You may have good days and bad days. Some days you miss your partner more e.g. days and events that had special meaning as a couple, holidays and family anniversaries. Try and pre-empt these events so you can arrange to spend the days with others if you feel it would be painful on your own, however being alone is fine too, there is no right or wrong way to spend special days.



## WHEN A PARENT DIES

- A parent's death can sometimes stir up conflicting emotions with siblings moving closer or further apart.
- If there is a surviving parent, the impact the death of a spouse has may differ from the emotions you are experiencing.
- Your relationship with the surviving parent may change. They may view themselves in a different way, causing a period of unease as you adjust to the change.
- The death of a parent can affect personal relationships between partners.
- The balance of generations change. Where once you were the parent's child, you may now be the older generation, impacting on how you look at your own mortality.

## WHEN A SIBLING DIES

- Siblings are often the forgotten grievers when the focus is on the parents or the siblings partner and possibly children.
- The sense of losing a friend, siblings share common memories and childhood experiences which may not have been shared with anyone else.
- There may be extra focus from parents on the surviving sibling which may be overwhelming.
- It may cause feelings of 'why them and not me' sharing the same genetic background may cause fears of your own mortality.

- It may be difficult to accept your sibling has died if they lived elsewhere and contact was limited, as the absence is normal it is harder to take in a permanent loss.
- You may feel a responsibility to watch over nieces and nephews and this can be another change to adapt to.

## WHEN A FRIEND DIES

- Friends are often of a similar age and background, making you view your own mortality differently when a friend dies.
- The death of a friend can sometimes change the relationship with other friends. They may not know how to support you and feel distance is the best option. You may feel the need to distance yourself from friends as seeing them is a painful reminder of your loss.
- Your friend may have been the person you went to in times of trouble and when you needed support through life's trials, no longer having that friend can make you feel desperate and lonely having no one to turn to.





## SUICIDE OR SUDDEN DEATH

- Being bereaved by suicide or sudden death can be described as ‘grief with the volume turned up’. People who have been bereaved this way, say it seems to intensify the normal responses to loss. You could feel a sharper guilt over your own actions, a more bitter blame towards someone else who you feel could have prevented the death, stronger anger at the person who died or a deep despair that someone close to you has died this way.
- People often ask ‘how are you feeling’, and it can be impossible to answer. You can be left with an over whelming jumble of feelings and thoughts. Unlike sudden death, suicide can make people feel that there is a stigma associated with the death.

## ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Anticipatory grief is what happens when you know there will be a loss, but it has not yet occurred. This is what occurs when you or your loved one is diagnosed with a terminal illness and have time to prepare. Unlike bereavement after a death, anticipatory grief is experienced by both the person who is ill and by the other family members. This grief process has a clearly defined beginning; it also has a definite ending. Unlike bereavement, anticipatory grief can include a period of hopefulness when the disease is being effectively managed.

## CHILDREN

Even though children may not understand the meaning of death until they are three or four years old, they feel the loss of close relatives in much the same way as adults. It is clear that, even from infancy, children grieve and feel great distress.

However, they have a different experience of time from adults and may go through the stages of mourning quite rapidly. In their early school years children may feel responsible for the death of a close relative and so may need to be reassured. Young people may not speak of their grief for fear of adding extra burdens to the grown-ups around them. The grief of children and adolescents, and their need for mourning,

should not be overlooked when a member of the family has died. They could for instance, be included in the funeral arrangements.

It is important that a child is told as quickly as possible when there is a death in the family. The news should be broken by the person closest to them in as simple and straightforward a manner as possible. Try not to use too many euphemisms. For instance “Grandfather’s gone on a long sleep” could instil in the child a fear of sleep. They will also keep wondering when Grandfather will wake up. The child should be encouraged to talk about the deceased and any questions answered briefly but truthfully.





## LOSS/BEREAVEMENT

We have losses all our lives, big and small. Life is full of endings and new beginnings but most of the time we don't recognise them. Leaving school, getting married, having a baby, being made redundant are all losses but the biggest loss of all is when someone dies.

Often when a loss has occurred we are not prepared for the roller-coaster of different emotions felt when someone close dies. Grief is not something that can be put off or ignored; it needs to be experienced, even though this can be very painful. Life is full of endings and new beginnings as we move through our journey of life. Death is an ending, the biggest ending we will ever experience, and this needs to be worked through. We need to grieve not only for the person that has died but for ourselves. Most people manage to work

through the cycle of grief in time, but for some, the maze of emotional feelings becomes overwhelming and the feeling of utter despair and loneliness can take over their lives.

## IN TIME

There will be days when on waking up you will forget what has happened and feel guilty for having done so. Then there will be days when, for a while, you can laugh with a friend, enjoy a programme on TV or admire a view.

And one day, you will find that you remember and think more about the life of the person who died than about how they died. You won't forget that, but it will seem less vivid than who they were and what you shared with them while they were alive.

# LOOKING after Yourself

**I**t is important to look after your physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs whilst experiencing grief.

## PHYSICALLY

### EXERCISE

Keeping fit and active can improve your physical health, mood and ability to cope with problems. Try to get at least some gentle exercise each week. You could go for a walk, do some gardening or housework.

### REST

The different emotions you experience through grief can make you feel more tired than normal. Try to take longer periods or rest. Even if you cannot sleep, it is important to get enough rest. Try to plan regular and consistent bedtimes.

### FOOD AND DRINK

What you eat or drink can affect your mood and sleep, try to cut down on junk food and introduce healthy food into your diet. Consider what you drink close to bedtime, caffeine and alcohol can interfere with your sleep.





## SPIRITUALLY

Religious organisations can be a great source of support, either in the form of individual support, attendance at services or exploration through reading. If you have no particular religious association you may find comfort through devising your own rituals – perhaps lighting a candle and just sitting quietly, thinking of the person who died, or spending time each week in a ‘special’ place – perhaps by the grave.



## SOCIALLY AND EMOTIONALLY

### FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Friends and family can really help you cope better, even if you don't feel like seeing anyone. It can be helpful to talk through difficulties and discuss ways of coping with someone that you are close to.

### CREATIVE EXPRESSION

You may find it helps to express your grief in creative ways i.e. writing, painting or music. Some people find that music can either soothe them or help bring the emotions right to the surface to be expressed through tears or words.

### RELAXATION

Make time for yourself to relax and give yourself space. Hobbies and interests may be a great way to unwind, you may want to take up something you have enjoyed in the past or start a new project.



# AT THE OFFICE



Create your own coffee break

Notice your body

Examine an everyday object with fresh eyes

Read or watch something funny

Listen to a guided relaxation

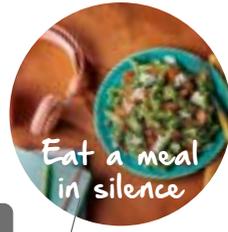
Write a quick poem



Do some gentle stretches



Walk outside



Eat a meal in silence

Take deep belly breaths



# 50 ways TO TAKE A BREAK

Find a relaxing scent

Meditate



Paint on a surface rather than paper

Rest your legs up the wall

Listen to music



Put on some music and dance

Take a bath



Write a letter

Light a candle

Turn off all electronics

Write in a journal

Colour with crayons

# AT HOME



Pet a furry creature



Make some music

# OUTDOORS

Climb a tree

Sit in nature

Go to a farmer's market



Go to a park

Watch the clouds



Engage in small act of kindness

Give thanks



View some art

Forgive someone

# EVERYWHERE



Let out a sigh

Move twice as slowly

Read poetry

Go for a run

Buy some flowers



Plant a tree or a flower



Fly a kite



Read a book

Call a friend

Learn something new

Take a nap



Let go of something

Watch the stars

Drive somewhere new

Meander around town



Take a bike ride



Go to a body of water



# Helpful BOOKS

We recommend the following grief and loss books as both helpful and comforting for those grieving the loss of a loved one.

## HOW TO GO ON LIVING WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVES DIES

**Therese Rando**



This easy and practical read helps you understand the grieving process and find comfort in learning you are 'normal' in your grief. This self-help book provides specific coping strategies for different situations.

## TEAR SOUP

**Pat Schweibert**



This book is informative about grief for adults as well as children. Good for a grieving family to read together.

## A GRIEF OBSERVED

**C.S. Lewis**



Mr Lewis marries late to the love of his life, who died four years later of bone cancer. This book is his heavy spiritual journey through grief following her death.

## I WASN'T READY TO SAY GOODBYE: Surviving, Coping and Healing After the Sudden Death of a Loved One

**Brook Noel and Pamela D Blair**



These two women have been there themselves, tell their stories, then provide a helpful hands-on approach to dealing with grief. It offers practical exercises for working through the mourning process. Especially helpful during the first weeks after a sudden tragic loss.

## SAFE PASSAGE: Words to Help the Grieving Hold Fast and Let Go

**Molly Fumia**



This book was written by Ms. Fumia as she belatedly mourned the loss of her first-born son. A compassionate, soothing book which helps the grieving hold fast to the memory of their loved one while passing through anger, confusion, guilt and loneliness to acceptance and transformation. Recommended for later on in the grief process.

## HEALING AFTER LOSS: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief

**Martha Whitmore Hickman**



Ms Hickman penned this volume of light, comforting thoughts after the death of her 16 year old daughter in a riding accident.

## WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

**Rabbi Harold Kushner**



Author experienced a crisis of faith when his 13 year-old son Aaron died of a rare disease. This national bestseller provides a uniquely practical and compassionate view on tragedy and grief. Especially helpful for those dealing with guilt issues or the 'if only's'.

## LIVING WHEN A LOVED ONE HAS DIED

**Earl Grollman**



A gentle, poetic journey through the realities, truth and hope of grief. In the form of poems, it expresses the raw feelings of grief, helping you feel what you need to feel, without making apologies for it. Recommended for the later stages of grief.

## TO BEGIN AGAIN

**Rabbi Naomi Levy**

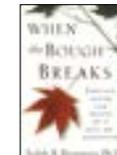


A deep and compassionate understanding of grief that is useful for those of any spiritual belief. Levy realises that the question after a personal tragedy should not be, 'why did this happen?' but rather, 'How can I go on?'

## FOR BEREAVED PARENTS

### WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS: Forever After the Death of a Son or Daughter

**Judith R. Bernstein**



Judith R. Bernstein is a psychologist and a bereaved parent, whose twenty-six year old son died of cancer. She doesn't believe in recovery concept. Instead she weaves her experience and the contributions of fifty other broken-hearted parents into a wonderful tapestry full of hope and resiliency.

### THE BEREAVED PARENT

**Harriett S. Schiff**

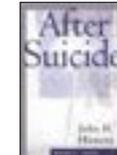


This highly recommended book provides sensitive and practical advice and necessary information to those who have 'stared at hell and survived'. As a bereaved parent herself, Schiff's tender and compassionate treatment of this painful subject makes her book a classic.

## FOR SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE

### AFTER SUICIDE

**John H. Hewitt**



Helps you put the issues of suicide into perspective, find answers to hard questions, and hold fast to hope. A practical guide to help dispel shame and begin the healing.

### NO TIME TO SAY GOODBYE: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One

**Carla Fine**



A very thorough and insightful resource for those coping with a suicide tragedy. More suitable for later on the grieving process.



# Where to GET HELP



## AGE UK

● 0800 055 6112

Call Age UK to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of information guides.  
[ageuk.org.uk](http://ageuk.org.uk)

## THE BEREAVEMENT CENTRE

● 07834 449 069

The Bereavement Centre is a leading bereavement organisation in the south of England, offering free face-to-face, telephone, Skype and online support.  
[thebereavementcentre.co.uk](http://thebereavementcentre.co.uk)

## OFF THE RECORD

● 0808 010 724

Provides free and confidential mental health support and information to young people aged 11-25 years old.

## SAMARITANS

● 116 123

Confidential, non-judgemental support for people in distress.  
[samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

## SANDS

● 0808 164 3332

Support to parents, grandparents and their families when a baby dies during pregnancy or after birth.  
[sands.org.uk](http://sands.org.uk)

## SILVERLINE

● 0800 470 8090

The Silver Line is a free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people. Open 24 hrs a day, every day of the year.  
[thesilverline.org.uk](http://thesilverline.org.uk)

## SIMON SAYS

● 023 8064 7550

Provides child bereavement support to children, parents, teachers and carers throughout Hampshire.  
[simonsays.org.uk](http://simonsays.org.uk)

## SOBS

● 0300 111 5065

A self-help, voluntary organisation. Many of those helping have themselves been bereaved by suicide.  
[uksobs.org](http://uksobs.org)

## WINSTONS WISH

● 08088 020 021

Offers support, information and guidance to people caring for a bereaved child.  
[winstonswish.org](http://winstonswish.org)

**Supported by**

# The **co-operative** funeralcare

Southern Co-op operate The Co-operative Funeralcare homes across the South.  
We hope this guide will be of benefit to the many people who are bereaved every year.



## **THE BEREAVEMENT** --- **CENTRE**

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