

the process of resolving grief and should be encouraged. People often avoid mentioning the name of the person who has died for fear that it will be upsetting. However, to the bereaved person it may seem as though others have forgotten their loss, adding a sense of isolation to their painful feelings of grief.

It must be remembered that festive occasions and anniversaries (not only of the death, but also birthdays and weddings) are particularly painful times when friends and relatives should make a special effort to be around.

It is important to allow people enough time to grieve. Some can seem to get over the loss quickly, but others take longer. So don't expect too much too soon from a bereaved relative or friend - they need the time to grieve properly.

Grief that is unresolved

There are people who seem hardly to grieve at all. They do not cry at the funeral, avoid any mention of their loss and return to their normal life remarkably quickly. This is their normal way of dealing with loss and no harm results, but others may suffer from strange physical symptoms or repeated spells of depression over the following years.

Some may not have the opportunity to grieve properly. The heavy demands of looking after a family or business may mean that there just isn't the time.

Some may start to grieve, but get stuck. The early sense of shock and disbelief just goes on and on. Years may pass and still the sufferer finds it hard to believe that the person they loved is dead. Others may carry on being unable to think of anything else, often making the room of the dead person into a kind of shrine to their memory.

Help from professionals

If someone is unable to resolve their grief, help can be arranged through a family doctor or one of the valuable voluntary or religious organisations. For some, it will be enough to meet people and talk with others who have been through the same experience. Others may need to see a bereavement counsellor or psychotherapist, either in a special group or on their own for a while.

Bereavement turns our world upside-down and is one of the most painful experiences we endure. It can be strange, terrible and overwhelming. In spite of this, it is a part of life that we all go through and usually does not require medical attention. For those who do run into trouble, help is at hand, not only from doctors, but from other organisations.

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For more information
they can be contacted on
020 7235 2351 or at
www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Four Seasons Health Care Limited
Emerson Court, Alderley Road,
Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 1NX
Tel: 01625 417800
Fax: 01625 417827
E-mail: fourseasons@fshc.co.uk
Website: www.fshc.co.uk

Advice on Bereavement



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Bereavement is a distressing but common experience. Sooner or later most of us will suffer the death of someone we love. Yet in our everyday life we think and talk about death very little. In spite of this we have to cope when we are finally faced with the death of someone we love.

In this leaflet you will find information about some of the ways in which people grieve after such a loss, about the ways in which bereaved people can get stuck in the grieving process and the help available.

Grieving

Grieving takes place after any sort of loss, but most powerfully after the death of someone we love. It is not just one feeling, but a whole succession of feelings, which take a while to get through and which cannot be hurried.

Grief is most commonly experienced after the death of someone we have known for some time.

In the few hours or days following the death of a close relative or friend, most people feel simply stunned, as though they cannot believe it has actually happened. They may feel like this even if the death has been expected. This sense of emotional numbness can be a help in getting through all the important practical arrangements that have to be made, such as getting in touch with relatives and organising the funeral.

For some, the funeral or memorial service is an occasion when the reality of what has happened really starts to sink in. It may be distressing to see the body or attend the funeral, but these are ways of saying goodbye to those we love. At the time, these things may seem too painful to go through and so are not done. However, this often leads to a sense of deep regret in future years.

Soon though, this numbness disappears and may be replaced by a dreadful sense of agitation, of pining or yearning for the dead person. There is a feeling of wanting somehow to find them, even though this is clearly impossible. This makes it difficult to relax or concentrate and it may be difficult to sleep properly. Dreams may be extremely disturbing. Some people feel that they 'see' their loved one everywhere they go - anywhere they had spent time together. People often feel very angry at this time - towards doctors and nurses who did not prevent the death, towards friends and relatives who did not do enough, or even towards the person who has left them.

Another common feeling is guilt. People find themselves going over in their minds all the things they would have liked to have said or done. They may even consider what they could have done differently that might have prevented the death. Of course, death is usually beyond anyone's control and a bereaved person may need to be reminded of this. Guilt may also arise if a sense of relief is felt when someone has died after a particularly painful or distressing illness. This feeling of relief is natural, extremely understandable and very common.

This state of agitation is usually strongest about two weeks after the death, but is soon followed by times of quiet sadness or depression, withdrawal and silence.

Although the agitation lessens, the periods of depression become more frequent and reach their peak between four and six weeks later. Spasms of grief can occur at any time, sparked off by people, places or things that bring back memories of the dead person. At this stage it may be tempting to keep away from other people who do not fully understand or share the grief. However, avoiding others can store up trouble for

the future and it is usually best to try to start to return to one's normal activities after a couple of weeks or so. During this time, it may appear to others as though the bereaved person is spending a lot of time just sitting, doing nothing. In fact, they are usually thinking about the person they have lost, going over again and again both the good times and the bad times they had together. This is a quiet but essential part of coming to terms with the death.

As time passes, the fierce pain of early bereavement begins to fade. The depression lessens and it is possible to think about other things and even to look again to the future. However, the sense of having lost a part of oneself never goes away entirely.

These various stages of mourning often overlap and show themselves in different ways in different people. Most recover from a major bereavement within one or two years. The final phase of grieving is a letting-go of the person who has died and the start of a new sort of life.

How can friends and relatives help?

Family and friends can help by spending time with the person who has been bereaved. It is not so much words of comfort that are needed, but more the willingness to be with them during the time of their pain and distress.

It is important that, if they wish it, bereaved people are able to cry with somebody and talk about their feelings of pain and distress without being told to pull themselves together. In time, they will get over it, but first they need to talk and to cry. Others may find it hard to understand why the bereaved have to keep going over the same ground again and again, but this is part of