

## **A teenage guide to coping with bereavement**

**Text by Sarah Darwen**

### **Introduction**

The most important thing to remember about grief is that it can affect different people in different ways. You may not experience all the things I have written about here – they are just examples.

When someone close to you dies, you suddenly have a lot of difficult emotions to deal with. Whether the death was expected or not, you will still feel shock, and this is dealt with in the first section. After these first, very confusing feelings, others will come which may surprise or even frighten you.

Each section deals with different aspects of your everyday life and outlines some ideas about how to cope with these and the changes that the bereavement has brought.

This leaflet is designed to help you help yourself get back on your feet.

I hope it helps.

### **At first**

Don't worry. Afterwards you may feel numb. You might even go through disbelief. If the person who has died was particularly close to you, you may expect them to walk through the door at any time.

### **Guilt and blame**

Some people find they feel guilt and begin to blame themselves about the death. If you feel this way, try to think rationally about your feelings. Blaming yourself will only make things worse. See if you can find someone to talk to about it.

### **Confusion**

You may feel that you do not understand what has happened to you. Of course you don't, why should you? It is highly unlikely that you've ever experienced anything like this before. It's all very natural and normal, so try not to panic. A bereavement like the one you've experienced is emotionally draining. You could feel depressed and begin to think about your own death. It sounds horrible, but it's a perfectly normal reaction.

### **Physical effects**

You could go off your food or even find it becomes tasteless. You may find it hard to sleep, and as a result, become tired and irritable, especially when trying to concentrate at school or work. These effects will pass in time.

### **Delayed grief**

The grief and feelings may emerge later. This could cause confusion, and you may think "Why now?" This is because we sometimes can't deal with strong feelings straightaway. Birthdays and other dates may bring back memories.

### **Getting back on track**

As you start to rebuild and carry on with your life, the feelings of shock, numbness of panic will fade. The bereavement has brought on great changes in your life, and now you will learn to cope with these.

## **The funeral**

If you've never been to one before, you'll probably want to know what it will be like, so ask someone. Your family may tell you not to go, but make sure you know what *you* want. It can be a good opportunity to say goodbye to the person who has died.

There might be people there that you don't know. You may be asked to shake hands with people and you could find this pretty awkward, especially as you're feeling upset. But remember, no-one expects you to be happy and smiling. Your family may welcome the chance to chat, and you can share feelings.

You might decide to go to the service, but not the burial or cremation.

There might be a wake, a gathering of family and friends before or after the service. If you don't want to go, see if you can find a friend or family member to escape with. It may be nice to have a good cry away from the formality of the service.

## **Friends and family**

The death may well have affected people around you.

### **Supporting each other**

As you're all going through the same thing, it's a good idea to talk to each other about your feelings. You can also have a good cry together and talk about the person you have lost. Remember, it's important to have memories, so don't be afraid to think and talk about the person who has died.

### **Friends**

Some friends may feel awkward about talking to you. This could be because they don't want to upset you, not because they are ignoring you. Try not to be upset about this. Instead, try to think how you would feel in their position.

Some might think it's all you want to talk about and this could be upsetting if you really don't want to talk to anyone. Let them know when you don't want to talk and when you do. It can be difficult to ask for a shoulder to cry on, but your friends will understand. That's what friends are for.

## **School**

Some people find they need more time than others before they are ready to go back to school. You may prefer to get back as soon as possible or would like to have a little time to get yourself together. Don't feel guilty about having time off. Giving yourself extra hassle is pointless. Exams can be taken again, but your life can't. Remember, everyone is different, so do whatever feels right for you.

It may be a good idea to make sure all your teachers know (if you are comfortable with that), so that they will understand if you seem a bit quiet or upset. Have a word (or ask someone else to) with your Form Teacher or Head of Year and they will pass it on to the rest of the staff.

If you are finding it difficult to cope with your work load as well as your grief, chat to your teachers and explain your situation. They should understand your problem and you can work together to reach a solution.

## **As time goes on**

Later, if you feel you have no-one to talk to, it's always possible to find a counsellor or other forms of support (see further help).

## **Coping and getting on**

Alright. You've just gone through, quite possibly, one of the worst experiences of your life. From now on, you have to focus on getting yourself back on track. At first it will seem awful carrying on without the person you have lost. It may seem like a big gap in your life.

## **Memories**

Try to remember the person who has died. It may be painful at first, but memories are really important. Keep photographs, letters etc. It might be awful to look at them now, but in later years you will be so glad you have them.

## **Help from others**

At the time of death, people will be very supportive, and rally around you. You will most likely get a lot more attention than you are used to. This is very nice and helpful at the time, but it will fade off later. Don't forget that

all these people have their own lives to get on with (and so have you). You may find it difficult without the extra help at first, but, with time, things will get easier for you.

### **Good and bad days**

Sometimes you will have a really awful day, when you feel you can't cope. You will feel anxious, tearful and tired, as grief is very exhausting. But you will also get really great days when you feel very hopeful and optimistic. Right now you may be having more bad days than good, but this will reverse in time. Don't feel guilty if you have a day when you don't think about the person that died. You don't have to be sad all the time! Give yourself permission to be happy.

### **Time heals**

The only thing that can really heal the pain of your grief is time. In a year, things could look very different, in five years... who knows? Look to the future, but don't forget the past.

### **Support**

Remember to look for counsellors and support groups locally. Don't feel bad or weird if you decide to have counselling. It's not at all unusual, in fact, it can be the best thing for you. You don't have to tell anyone if you are embarrassed about it.

### **Further help**

Child Bereavement UK provides confidential support, information and guidance. Our professionally trained bereavement support workers are available to take your call or respond to email 9am – 5pm Monday – Friday.

[www.childbereavementuk.org/support/young-people/](http://www.childbereavementuk.org/support/young-people/) hosts a range of information for bereaved young people, including guidance, other people's experiences and films made by our Young People's Advisory Group.

The website also contains a searchable database and interactive map of other support organisations, websites or forums across the country.

### **Support and Information**

0800 02 888 40\* (\*Freephone number. Some mobile providers may charge, alternatively call 01494 568900)

[support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)

[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)