



COPING WITH BEREAVEMENT ...

*the long
journey of
recovery*

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THE BEREAVEMENT PROCESS

Grief is like a journey that you have to travel through. It takes time. You need time to grieve and to come to terms with your loss. It may help to recognise the different stages of bereavement. Most people go through each of these.

Stage 1: SHOCK

The first reaction to a loved one's death is often shock, even if it is expected. Suddenly he or she is gone.

Stage 2: NUMBNESS

Next we often feel numb. It seems unreal. We walk around in a daze. We can't take it in.

Stage 3: FANTASY AND REALITY

In this stage we struggle to come to terms with what has happened. Sometimes it seems as if our loved one has just gone away for a while and will return. We half expect them to walk through the door. Sometimes we are troubled with feelings of guilt: 'if only I had done this', 'if only I had done that'.

Stage 4: THE RELEASE OF GRIEF

We express our full grief and sadness. A release of emotions is helpful and brings healing.

Stage 5: PAINFUL MEMORIES

We work through our painful memories. This takes time.

Stage 6: LEARNING TO LIVE AGAIN

Having accepted our loss and having expressed our grief we can begin to live again, not forgetting our loved ones, but facing the future with hope.

The first twelve months are the hardest, coping with birthdays, anniversaries and Christmas. The second twelve months are easier, but emotions can still be raw, depressions deeper. These are harder to deal with now, because they are less expected and may be seen as failure to cope.

Grief is a very individual process and each of us react differently; so do not feel that you are in any way abnormal if yours does not appear to follow the pattern outlined above or you revisit earlier stages.

THE EFFECTS OF GRIEF

Grief affects:

1. Our Relationships with other People

We are all affected when someone suffers, a grieving person affects those around and some people feel embarrassed. To reduce the discomfort other people may avoid us or try to reduce contact as much as possible. This is sometimes done for sincere and kind motives even if it is very unhelpful.

People may cross the road when they see someone coming who has been through bereavement so that they do not have to talk about it. When they do meet, the subjects spoken of may include anything but the bereavement, because they think that you would not want to mention it and it would cause upset! Some people speak of feeling a sense of isolation and loneliness. Grief overshadows all normal relationships as we, and others, adjust to what has happened.

2. Our Bodies

Our bodies react to bereavement in many ways. Headaches, stomach pains, arthritis, or many other complaints can suddenly become apparent and make us feel as if we are falling apart. Some people speak of intense tiredness and exhaustion. All of our reserves of energy can be used up simply in order to cope.

This is a natural reaction to loss. The body passes through a crucial stage in the first 6-9 months and some folk can suffer if they 'bottle up' their feelings and are unable to express and come to terms with grief openly. It is important to look after oneself, to eat and sleep properly.

3. Our Feelings and State of Mind

We described earlier the emotional stages through which most people pass. These stages are not neat and tidy and one may feel several of them going on at once. We are all different people and so all have unique feelings.

It is possible to swing from one stage to another, or indeed hardly experience one stage at all. This does not mean that the grief of one person is deeper than another, simply that we have different ways of experiencing and coping with loss.

TEN DO'S AND DON'TS

1. Don't - make big changes that are stressful or be rushed into decisions like moving house while you are still grieving.
2. Don't - listen to people who expect you to bounce back only months after the funeral, it may take up to 2 years or more to go through a bereavement. Take your time.
3. Don't - hide your feelings and feel afraid to talk about your grief.
4. Don't - neglect yourself in any way. Visit the doctor if you feel unwell.
5. Don't - take drugs, alcohol or smoke to excess.
6. Do - take care of yourself - eat properly and rest, arrange a holiday.
7. Do - see friends and get out and begin to enjoy things - perhaps come to church. At St Paul's, there are services every Sunday at 9.15am (multi-sensory, interactive, family-friendly service with children's groups) and 11am (reflective, traditional service, usually with Holy Communion).
8. Do - talk about the person who has died.
9. Do - call the Barnet Bereavement Project or CRUSE if you would like to talk to a trained listener.
10. Do - take time to explore the bigger questions of life that will have been raised by your encounter with death. Going on a Christian enquirers course such as *Alpha*, *Emmaus* or *Start!* would be a good place to start. If you have access to the internet look at www.rejesus.co.uk - a website that provides a place where people can explore faith through the person of Jesus and his followers.

ONE MAN'S STORY 'How I found peace with God and a new purpose for life.'

Retired BT Engineer Fred, describes what happened when his wife, Sheila, died of cancer.

Sheila and I had been married 42 years. I had known her since she was 14. When she died, 15 months ago, I wish I had died with her. I just sat down on the stairs and broke my heart. I still cry, every week. I still love her and I still miss her.

After the funeral I felt the need to go to church. When I went that first Sunday I realised how long I had been away and what I had been missing all these years.

Now I've been going to church for over a year and I've never looked back. I live for Sunday mornings. I've re-found my faith and it has brought me through. I have learnt a lot about my faith from the confirmation course and from Alpha and I know what it really means. Although I still miss my wife, being part of a worshipping Christian community has restored my faith in God.

SOURCES OF HELP AND ADVICE

The list of organisations below may help you. You can contact them yourself, or ask a relative or friend to do it for you. You could also check with your local Citizen's Advice Bureau to find out what bereavement services are available in your area. Failing this, your G.P., clergy or local Social Services Department may be able to help you.

1. Barnet Bereavement Project

The project offers counselling for who those have been bereaved by the death of a relative or close friend. People are seen either in their own homes or at the project office.

Barnet Bereavement Project Office, Greenhill New Church Centre, 177 Leicester Road, New Barnet EN5 5EB. **Tel** 020 8441 3572

Opening Hours: Monday to Thursday 10am - 4pm

2. Premier lifeline

This Christian help-line offers a listening ear, information and prayer to people.

Tel 0845 652 5252 (staffed daily between 9am and 12 midnight)
Email lifeline@premier.org.uk **Website** www.premier.org.uk

3. Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse is the national bereavement care organisation. It offers free information and advice to anyone who has been affected by a death.

Office Tel 020 8940 4818. **Help-line Tel** 0844 477 9400

Email helpline@crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Website www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

4. The Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS)

SANDS provides support for bereaved parents and their families when their baby dies at or soon after birth.

National Office Tel 020 7436 7940.

Help-line Tel 020 7436 5881 (staffed Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9.30am – 5.30pm; Tuesday and Thursday between 6pm and 10pm). **Email** support@uk-sands.org **Website** www.uk-sands.org

5. The Compassionate Friends

Compassionate Friends offers understanding, support and encouragement to parents and others after the death of a child or children. **Office Tel** 0845 123 2304

Help-line Tel 0845 123 2304 (staffed 10am - 4pm and 7pm - 10pm).
Email info@tcf.org.uk **Website** www.tcf.org.uk

6. Age Concern

Age Concern is the largest charitable movement in the UK concerned with the needs and aspirations of older people and the leading authority on ageing related issues.

Its free **national information help-line number** is 0800 009966 (staffed daily 7am – 7pm). **Website** www.ageconcern.org.uk

Age Concern Barnet is located at: Meritage Centre, Church End, Hendon London NW4 4JT. **Tel** 020 8203 5040.

Email barnet_finchley@ageconcern.org.uk

7. Help the Aged

Help the Aged addresses issues that matter to older people. In particular it works to combat poverty, reduce isolation, defeat ageism and challenge poor care standards. It does this by campaigns, research and developing practical solutions.

Its Seniorline **free telephone advice number** is 0808 800 6565 (staffed Monday- Friday 9am-4pm). **Website** www.helptheaged.org.uk

WORDS FOR REFLECTION

Jesus said to his disciples "Don't be worried! Have faith in God and have faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. I wouldn't tell you this, unless it was true. I am going there to prepare a place for you. After I have done this I will come back and take you with me. Then we will be together. You know the way to where I am going."

Thomas said, "Lord, we don't even know where you are going! How Can we know the way."

"I am the way, the truth and the life!" Jesus answered. Without me, no one can go to the Father I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn't like the peace that this world can give. So don't be worried or afraid."

The Bible – John 14:1-6, 27

They are gone; their pain is over and they are gone.
The funeral is over and the family and friends have left.
The letters are answered. But the emptiness remains.

The emptiness and so much more. I am angry, God.
I am angry with them for dying and angry with you for letting them die. I am angry at friends, who have been so kind, because they are alive and because those they love are alive.

O God, why have you let this happen? Why did you forsake us?
Creator – why uncreate? Redeemer – why destroy wholeness?
Source of love – why rip away? The one I loved so utterly?
Why? Why, O God?

In this pit of darkness, hollowed out by grief and screaming,
I reach out to the one I loved and cannot touch.

Where are you, God? Where are you,
except here in my wounds which are also yours.

God, as I hurl at you
my aching rage and bitterness,
hold me,

And stay here until this hacked-off stump of life
discovers greenness again.

I am angry because I failed my loved one so often.
I hurt them. I was selfish thoughtless, mean.
And now they are gone, and I cannot undo the past.

It might be easier to pretend I am not angry
but I cannot fool you, God.
Help me through this time of anger and pain, of guilt and loss.
Help me to live as they – and you – would like me to live.

As the rain hides the stars,
as the autumn mist hides the hills,
as the clouds veil the blue of the sky,
so the dark happenings of my lot
hide the shining of your face from me.
Yet, if I may hold your hand in the darkness,
it is enough. Since I know that,
though I may stumble in my going,
you do not fall.

Give me the strength for this day
to weep when I should weep
to accept the comfort that memories bring
to face decisions with courage
to meet people
those who love me
those who want to help me
those who want to comfort me
but don't know what to say
Thank you for them all.

*St Paul's seeks to be an all-age and multicultural community of Christians
committed to worshipping God, loving our neighbour,
and enabling people to become life-long followers of Jesus Christ.*