



Bereavement - coping with grief

A guide for bereaved parents,
families and carers

Bereavement - coping with grief

We would like to offer you and your family our deepest sympathy at this difficult time. This leaflet contains information about grief and bereavement.

People react in different ways after the death of a child. No one can predict exactly how you will feel, but it is likely that you will experience many different thoughts and feelings in the days, weeks, months and years ahead.

We hope this leaflet helps you to understand a bit more about grief and how to cope. Please speak to staff if you have questions or if we can help in any way.

What is grief?

Grief is a normal reaction to loss. We grieve after all sorts of losses in our lives but it is most powerful when someone we love dies. Grief is part of saying goodbye. Grieving is not a predictable “process”, it usually involves a huge range of different thoughts, feelings and physical reactions with varying intensity.

Many people describe a ‘rollercoaster’ of emotions. You may feel numb, or find it difficult to believe what has happened. You may feel intensely sad, angry or guilty. If your child was very ill you may feel relief that he or she is no longer suffering. You may also feel panicky about what needs to be done, or about what lies ahead. These feelings may be so mixed up and powerful that you wonder if you are going mad. You are not, but it may help to talk about how you feel with someone you trust.

How can I cope with my grief?

As you try to deal with the emotional upheaval of your child’s death, the following thoughts may be helpful.

Do it your way

We are all unique and we react to death in different ways. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Just try to do what feels right for you.

Take your time

It's important, especially in the early days, that you allow yourself:

- Time to take in what has happened.
- Time to talk about your child and their death.
- Time to feel the pain and the sadness.
- Time for yourself.

Support each other

If you have a partner it's important to understand that although you may expect them to be a special help at this time, it's common for parents to grieve in different ways. This can sometimes make it harder to understand and to support one another. Talk openly about your grief with your partner. Try to acknowledge and accept each other's ways of coping, even though they may be quite different.

Take care of yourself

It is important to look after yourself physically as well as emotionally. For example, you should try to eat well and avoid drinking too much alcohol. It's also important to know that it's normal to feel afraid, have nightmares or struggle to see the point of life. However if you're worried about your health or your feelings, you should speak to your doctor.

Friends and family

In the days ahead it is likely that people will want to express their sadness and offer their support. If people offer help, it's good to have some ideas of practical things they could do. Perhaps cook some meals for you, clean, pick up some shopping, take calls or messages. If you have other children it may be helpful to have some help with childcare or doing the school run.

Support from friends and family is great but can also become overwhelming. If you need some space it is important to remember that you don't have to see or speak to everyone who gets in touch. You can choose who you want to contact and others can take messages or speak to them on your behalf. A voicemail / answerphone message or sign on your door can be helpful ways to let others know you need some time for yourself.

As time goes on you may find people become less sure of how and when to offer their support. You may have to make the first move by letting friends know that you want their company, that it's ok to talk about your child and that they haven't 'upset' you if you cry.

Having a support person

During this time you might find it helpful to have a support person. This could be a family member or close friend. They might help with practical issues such as transport or shopping, and remember things for you. If you wish they could speak on your behalf. More importantly they can listen and talk to you about things that are on your mind when you are upset.

Remember...

Grief is natural - it's part of what it is to be human and to have feelings.

Grief is a journey – it's often hard, but it will get easier.

Grief has no shortcuts - grief takes time. It often takes much longer than you or the people around you may expect.

It's normal both to grieve and live - when you find yourself not thinking about your child for a while, that is alright.

Grief can be scary - it can lead to depressing thoughts and even thoughts of suicide. It's natural to think this way and important to talk about it.

Finally, it's important not to expect too much of yourself, and know when to ask for help. The death of a child is one of the worst things that can happen to anyone, and there are no quick ways of adjusting. It can be helpful to find someone you trust that you can talk to - for example a friend, your doctor or religious leader. If you feel you are struggling to cope then you may want to speak with your doctor about getting specialist support. You can also contact one of the organisations listed in the *Useful contacts* leaflet.