

Coping with Grief

Many people feel such intense emotional pain following a death that they wonder if they can survive. It may be hard to believe in the early days, but the pain does ease and thoughts about the person who has died become more comfortable and the happy memories are treasured.

Bereaved people may wonder how to get through their grief. The grief process is like a journey running from the starting point of bereavement to a new life. Progress is made through grief as the feelings are worked through. Freud called this grief work.



Some strategies for dealing with grief

Grief time

Some people find it helpful to spend fifteen to twenty minutes alone every day. They put on the answering machine so they won't be disturbed. This time acts as a safety valve. In it they deal with any emotions they have stored up during the day.

There are different ways of grieving at these times: thinking, crying, praying, meditating, writing or drawing, talking to the dog!

Some people like to keep a diary. They write down their feelings and the memories of the loved one. They can then see how their grief changes over a period of weeks and months. This is proof of progress. If the diary is kept in a safe place the written memories become precious in the future. Alternatively some people feel more comfortable with pictures or diagrams.

Many people feel less alone by also grieving with other family members, including the [children](#).



Tears

Many people find crying a relief. Rather than being an indication of weakness, tears are often a sign of strength and show that the bereaved person is prepared to work through their grief. Some people find it difficult to cry, and yearn for tears to release their grief.



Enlisting help

The process can seem long and lonely, so many people find someone whom they can confide in, for example, a relative or friend. Doctors or the local community health centre may be able to help in this way, or refer bereaved people to a specialist grief counsellor. Some people find the experience of another person who has been through a similar situation invaluable, and so contact a support group



Some other useful strategies

- Live a day at a time
- Do something special for yourself every day
- Do not make any major decisions, such as selling the house, in the first year if possible



Some other strategies

- Talk to a caring friend, pastor or counsellor
- Join a bereavement support group
- Read books on grief.
- Write letters to the person you have lost to express your feelings or as a way of saying goodbye. You can then keep these in a safe place, or bury them under a bush you plant in their memory, or scatter the pieces in a significant place.
- Keep a journal as a record of your own journey of grief.
- Create a memorial for the person who died: plant a tree, create a memory book or photo album. Children often like to collect items for a memento box.
- Commemorate the person you lost on special days, such as birthdays, Christmas, Father's Day. Light a candle, drink their favourite bottle of wine, talk about them. Then go and do something special for yourselves- you deserve it! Plan these activities with the rest of the family.



Self Care

Self care is important to prevent further stress to the body. The following have been found to be helpful in coping with grief:

- A regular daily routine. Have set times for getting up, meals and going to bed.
- A balanced diet. Include: breads and cereals; meat, fish and dairy products; fruit and vegetables.
- Avoid too much coffee and tea to help you sleep at night.
- Outdoor activities, such as going for a walk or gardening take you away from the stress, and refresh you mentally.
- Exercise, such as swimming, walking and team games, will produce chemicals called endorphins in the body which help to counteract depression and make you feel good. The exercise does not need to be strenuous. If you have doubts about your fitness consult your doctor.
- Relaxation: meditation, massage, music.
- A relaxing pre-sleep routine: winding down before bed and not watching television.
- Avoiding seeking relief through alcohol, smoking, medication and other drugs
- Consulting the doctor about physical symptoms, for a blood pressure check, for practical help, for medical certificates, and for help with the grief.



Be patient, tolerant and gentle with yourself as you grieve. It is important to seek professional help when you feel overwhelmed by your grief or memories. No one has to bear it all alone. There is help available.