

Children, young people and grief

We naturally want to protect children and can often feel unsure of how to support them after a death.

Children and young people do grieve and often experience the same range of emotions as adults, however their understanding of the death is dependent on their developmental stage.

Young children can struggle to understand that someone won't ever come back, whilst older children may understand but can worry that those around them might also die.

Grieving is a long term process and some children won't feel the full impact of the death until they are much older. The most important thing we can do is to talk to them openly without using euphemisms such as 'gone to sleep' or 'lost'. Include them, allow them time out from their grieving, just to be with friends - to play and just to get caught up in normal living.

It's not easy and there is no right or wrong way to grieve however most children will successfully manage the death of someone close to them without the need for any specialist support.



There are many places you can turn to for bereavement support and advice including:

Ayrshire Hospice Counselling and Bereavement Support

t: 01292 269200

Email enquiries can be sent to:

AA-UHB.AyrshireHospiceReferral@aaapct.scot.nhs.uk

www.ayrshirehospice.org

Bereavement Advice Centre

t: 0800 634 9494

e: info@bereavementadvice.org

www.bereavementadvice.org

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

t: 0845 600 2227

www.crusescotland.org.uk

e: support@crusescotland.org.uk

MIND

www.mind.org

PAPYRUS

Voluntary organisation that supports teenagers and young adults who are feeling suicidal.

t: 0800 068 41 41 www.papyrus-uk.org

www.hopeagain.org.uk

Hope Again is a website designed for young people by young people who are affected by bereavement.

t: 0808 808 1677 (Young person's helpline)

Samaritans

Operates a 24-hour service 365 days a year.

t: 08457 90 90 90

e: jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Winston's Wish

Information and advice for anyone supporting bereaved children and young people.

Enquiries: 01242 515157 Helpline: 08452 03 04 05

www.winstonswish.org.uk

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**Ayrshire
Hospice**

Making today matter

Understanding grief

www.ayrshirehospice.org

This leaflet offers information about grief. It describes the normal feelings of grief but also recognises that grief can be overwhelming. Everyone handles grief in their own way and we hope this leaflet will help you to discover what is right for you.

We also highlight some practical issues and signpost further resources.

Grief

Grief is the natural response to the death of someone close to you. Grief is normal, but unique to each and every person. Its intensity is often felt as a deep yearning for the other person, and varies from person to person and often from moment to moment. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Grief can be experienced in many different ways. It can feel like a numbness or denial, and you may have difficulty in believing that the person close to you has actually died. It is common to be angry at people, or the healthcare system, or life. You might be burdened by guilt, feeling low all the time or depressed, just yearning for the person to come back in to your life. Grief is complex.

People respond to grief in many different ways. Some withdraw into a cocoon, some put energy into raising money or supporting campaigns, others want just to talk and talk. You may want to try to relive memories, but others may find that memories and photographs trigger waves of tears. Tears can help you feel better, but at the same time you may feel exhausted.

Some people feel physically ill with headaches, weakness, a feeling of tightness in the chest and throat. They can feel highly anxious. This is normal and doesn't mean that you have a serious illness.



The journey

Grief is sometimes seen as a journey, but a journey that can sometimes take much longer than you imagine. In fact sometimes you may feel that things are actually getting worse before they get better. The thing to hold onto is the hope that in time the pain does ease and you will be able to adjust to what has happened and reintegrate into life. Just go at your own pace and do things your way.

Not everyone is able to work through their grief on their own. A small number of people find that they are stuck in their grief. Some develop suicidal thoughts either because they feel unable to face life without the person, or because they feel that by dying they may be reunited. If you have suicidal thoughts don't be afraid to discuss them with a close friend or relative, your GP or other professional or contact one of the helplines at the back of this leaflet.

When you are grieving what can help?

There are many ways to handle grief. Take time to discover what is best for you. Sometimes just talking to friends and getting your feelings out into the open is helpful. Remember we are all unique so have the confidence to do things your way and at your own pace.

If you are feeling stressed, then try to relax and take care of yourself. Sometimes you may want to take time off work and although hard, some social contact is good. It can help to try and add some routine into your days such as walking or taking part in activities and there may come a time when it is best to seek additional support, either from friends, family or professional agencies.



Being there for someone who is grieving

When you are supporting someone else who is grieving, try to remember that grief is a part of everyday life. Recognise that the pain carried by people who are bereaved is often hidden, and reassure them that what they are feeling is normal. Try not to avoid them, they may need some company and it helps to be able to offer a non-judgemental, listening ear.

Quite often when family and friends "return to normal", the bereaved person can feel that they are a burden or may struggle to share how they feel for fear of continuing to upset others. It's important to remember this and check in with them - simply telling them you're here to chat when they need to, can be enough.



Practical matters

When you experience the death of someone close to you dealing with practical issues can seem daunting. This can be especially difficult when it is your spouse or partner as your financial situation may be affected and you may be anxious about experiencing financial need.

Speak to your local Citizens Advice, welfare rights or money advice centre who are able to provide you with information about claiming benefits, dealing with finances or sign posting to other agencies.