

Bereavement and Grief

A Thrive Worldwide Resource

The death of a friend, colleague or family member is very distressing, even devastating. And depending on the nature of your loss, the impact and grieving process will be unique to each person.

This information sheet will provide some insight on normal reactions to grief as well as some ideas on how to navigate the days and weeks following a significant loss. Thoughts and feelings after a significant loss can be strong and sometimes frightening. It is normal to have feelings of anxiety, numbness/denial, and helplessness. Feelings of anger are also common, followed by feelings of sadness. Most of the

time, the strength of these feelings decrease over time. If you continue to experience behaviours and emotions that disrupt your daily functioning after 4-6 weeks, consider professional support. (see the chart on the next page for a comprehensive list of post-crisis symptoms).

The National Health Service in the UK describes 4 general phases of grief:

- Accepting that your loss is real
- Experiencing the pain of grief
- Adjusting to life without the person who died
- Putting less emotional energy into grieving and putting it into something new - in other words, moving on

These are broad phases, but it is

good to remember that the hard work of grief does not always follow a linear process. With

grief there are good days and bad days.

CHANGES IN EMOTIONS

- Guilt and shame
- Shock or numbness
- Sadness and crying
- Constant worry, fear, paranoia
- Self-blame
- Hopelessness or meaninglessness
- Feeling flat, not finding pleasure
- Low self-esteem
- Disturbing dreams

CHANGES IN YOUR BODY

- Fatigue/tiredness
- Sleep problems
- Digestive/stomach problems
- Weight loss or gain
- Headaches, or other general pain
- Feeling physically charged / tense muscles
- Heart problems
- Susceptible to sickness/infections

CHANGES IN YOUR THINKING

- Intrusive thoughts or images
- Impulse to make big decisions
- Denial/disbelief
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of creativity
- Obsessing and/or ruminating
- Poor decision-making ability
- Cynicism and pessimism

CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR

- Substance use
- Withdrawing socially
- Increase in smoking/drinking
- Eating more or less
- Interpersonal conflict/irritability
- Reduced performance
- Staying in bed
- Deflecting conflict or tension
- Carelessness or risky activity

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Take care of yourself

Give yourself time to grieve and don't expect as much out of yourself. Be with people that you enjoy. Try to keep some familiar routines that make you feel normal. If it helps to keep busy, set small goals for yourself and accept that you're not operating at full capacity. Avoid making big life decisions.

Maintain wellbeing

Try to keep a normal sleep routine, drink enough water and eat well. Grieving and coordinating arrangements takes a lot of energy, and it's important that we look after our bodies. Keep your exercise routine going, or continue your routine walk at lunchtime. Avoid drinking alcohol or using substances.

Connect

Talking and crying with trusted people is an important part of the process. Know that it's okay to be vulnerable and that people want to talk with you. Avoid isolating and "white-knuckling" through the grief on your own.

Social connectedness is a major protective factor against developing complicated grief.

Accept the reality

Attending a funeral or memorial service can aid in accepting the loss. Talking with other people who were there or know what happened can also help the reality set in and facilitate the grieving process. Some people find that writing a letter can be a cathartic exercise. The letter could be shared with others, or kept to yourself.

Care for the caregiver / managers

If you have been part of supporting others through a critical incident, be sure that gauge your wellbeing and create extra time and space for your own process.

If you think it would be helpful to speak to someone, please do. Even if there isn't anything 'psychologically wrong', speaking to a good listener can assist in the recovery process, and there's no need to wait until symptoms persist for months

and months without getting help. Or if you feel that one of your colleagues is stuck and not coping well after a month or two, let them know that professional resources are available. Thrive Worldwide provides psychosocial support to international humanitarian, development, and mission organisations around the world and would be happy to hear from you. Please get in touch with us at: info@thrive-worldwide.org

RESOURCES

In the UK, you can contact other support organisations directly, such as Cruse Bereavement Care (cruse.org.uk) on 0808 808 1677 or Samaritans on 116 123.

Outside the UK, you can access several online resources including:

- Royal College of Psychiatrists has a webpage on bereavement: bit.ly/3ca9uWb
- Psych Central online has a compilation of grief

resources, ideas for processing grief and online support groups.

BOOKS

- The Cruse Bereavement Care centre has recommended reading: bit.ly/3qMZzKc
- A Grief Observed, by CS Lewis: amzn.to/3c8HAK5
- A Special Scar, by Alison Wertheimer. For death by suicide: amzn.to/2M1kV7X
- And because reading can be difficult during times of bereavement, you may want to find a good book to listen to on Audible: adbl.co/368cXko

Thank you for accessing this resource.
For more resources and dedicated support:
visit www.thrive-worldwide.org
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