

UWE Wellbeing Service

Bereavement and Grieving

"I want to lock those feelings away because they're personal to me. I know it helps to talk but I don't want people to see me upset and not coping"

Bereavement and grieving for the loss of someone or something you care for often is very painful and devastating. There is no right or wrong way to feel – we all grieve in different ways. Some of us experience a lot of emotions and others nothing at all. Some days you feel fine, others you may wake up feeling leaden. Or it may suddenly hit you like a huge wave of grief – and some people fear that once they start crying they may never stop.

'You care so much you feel as though you will bleed to death with the pain of it.'

JK Rowling 'Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix'

You may be grieving the death of a parent, sibling, other family member; or a friend, a pet, or the end of a relationship. Bereavement is the experience of loss; grieving is the emotional process. There is no set time for grieving; sometimes it can be delayed; sometimes it never seems to end; it can last a few weeks, months, a year or more. It does usually get less intense as time goes on. **Typical emotions include confusion, sadness, tears, anger, guilt, relief, exhaustion, aloneness.**

'They don't understand': other people's reactions (especially people who have not yet had a 'big' bereavement), may be difficult. People may be clumsy with how they are with you. Some people avoid contact or saying anything for fear of making it worse or because they don't know what to say.

Look after the fundamentals: Take one day at a time – get enough sleep, take some exercise, eat 'well', select people who could understand and be supportive, take some 'time out' from grieving and take care with using too much alcohol or other 'drowning' substances.

Be kind to yourself: Coping is often perceived as doing it all yourself, and not showing your emotions. Recognise that this is one of life's big challenges and that it is normal to feel upset, have mood swings or feel very down. Anniversaries and birthdays can be difficult, so get some support.

Recognising impact on your studies: It is difficult to study when we are pre-occupied. You may be supporting family and your role in your family / friendship groups may have changed. Give yourself permission to get some support: tutors, family, friends, the Octagon Centre or the Wellbeing Service.

If you're not coping - if you are worried about yourself, can't get out of bed or face going out, or have other concerns - see your GP.

UWE Wellbeing Service

Bereavement and Grieving

Some Grief Theory

- **Continuing Bonds:** that despite your loss you are likely to always have a 'continuing bond' with someone you loved, & they will always be important to you.
- **Ambivalent Feelings:** Some bereavements bring up very mixed feelings. If the relationship wasn't as loving as you would have liked, you may also be grieving the relationship you never had. Suicides are especially difficult to survive because of all the unanswered questions.
- **Dual Process:** This suggests we swing between two different states: **Restoration:** getting on with life, eg work, learning new skills **Loss:** overwhelm with feelings e.g. weepy, feeling down. These swings can be quite sudden or get stuck and both are part of grieving.
- **Tasks of Grieving:** This approach identifies the 'tasks' of mourning: Accepting (the loss); Pain; Adjusting to different environments; Finding enduring connection.

Some helping strategies

- Talking to someone /people who listen and understand. Support groups may be helpful.
- Creating memory books, boxes, poems or writing to the person who has died. Marking special bonds eg memorial stones, trees, special places, anniversaries.

Websites / organisations

- **Cruse** - a national with local branches: information, support services. <https://www.cruse.org.uk/> Useful free booklets and factsheets <http://tinyurl.com/zd2cmjl>
- **NHS Choices** - Much useful information; you can also look up support organisations close to you <http://tinyurl.com/jks3sgp> <http://tinyurl.com/q4tb3qe>

Video links

- Death of a Parent by Alex Everett <http://tinyurl.com/jerkcxf>
- NHS video: Cary and her mother talk about responses to her father's suicide <http://tinyurl.com/j654kwl>

UWE library

- Lendrum, S. & Syme, G. (2004) 2nd ed **Gift of Tears: A Practical Approach to Loss and Bereavement in Counselling and Psychotherapy** Available: [Frenchay](#), Glenside
- Kubler-Ross E (2005) **On Grief and Grieving:** Finding the meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss. Available: [Glenside](#)
- Tattelbaum J (1993) **The Courage to Grieve:** Creative Living, Recovery and Growth through Grief. Available on shelf: [Glenside](#)

