



Bereavement | Coping

“Only in the darkness can you see the stars” Martin Luther King Jr

Losing a loved one can be a very traumatic and stressful experience. Understanding what to expect physically and emotionally, and recognising that certain thoughts and feelings are normal will help get you through this sensitive and challenging transition in your life.

Grief is a natural process

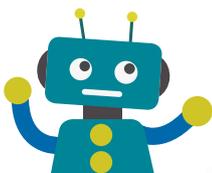
Grief is a painful, but normal human reaction and unless it is complicated, prolonged or exceptionally intense the feelings will be naturally processed and ease through time without the need for professional support.

There are three main stages of grieving: **shock**, **mourning**, and **acceptance**

Shock/denial - This happens immediately following the death and can last for a few hours or several days. You may experience feeling emotionally numb alongside the inability to accept or believe the death.

Mourning - This stage of the grieving process typically begins approximately one week after the death and can last for up to six months. You may experience a general sense of sadness, loss of appetite, tearfulness, anxiety, anger, poor concentration, tiredness and feelings of guilt alongside medically unexplained physical symptoms, aches and pains. Some people feel the need to blame themselves, someone else, or something for the death. Once the reality of the loss sinks in, a natural reaction is to worry about one's own future and how the loss will affect you. It is common at this stage to feel overwhelmed that you cannot cope with life; become preoccupied with and ruminate on negative thoughts, remember experiences you shared and grieve for the loss of future experiences that will not be shared. This is particularly intense when experiencing the pain of losing a child. One mourns a parent for what they had, but one mourns a child for what could have been. With time the memories of a lost parent become nostalgia; feelings are coupled with warm memories of love and celebration of a life lived. When one loses a child, each celebration is coupled with “our child will never see this.”

Acceptance - This is the third and final stage of the grieving process. It is perhaps better described as “recognition of reality”, as it is arguable whether one will ever fully accept the death, loss of a loved one.





For most people the intense grief related experiences, reaction to the loss gradually begin to subside approximately six months after the death of a loved one. However, anger and guilt can continue to loom in the minds of many; you may feel or blame yourself that you could have done something that would have changed the outcome. Feelings of anger and guilt can get in the way of the natural healing process.

Coping with grief

Grief is a subjective experience and how we cope with it depends on our personality, relationship to the person at the time of and context of their death, perceptions and support systems. Initially, it is a good idea to turn to family and friends for support as they too need to work through the grieving process.

You can also seek help from your GP who can signpost you to bereavement support groups in the locality especially if you feel stuck, emotionally overwhelmed and unable to cope.

Self-help resources and stress management strategies may also provide a useful resource at what can be a challenging time.

