



DEALING WITH BEREAVEMENT

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Bereavement and Loss

Understanding bereavement begins with the recognition of the inevitability of death for ourselves and for those around us. Facing death as a reality helps us to value our own lives. Making sense of death helps us when we face times of grief and loss.

Grief has many faces and effects people in different ways. You cannot experience grief for another person nor know exactly how another person feels when they are grieving. It is important to share thoughts and feelings with those around you and who are hoping to support you through the grief you are experiencing.

Grief is shaped by the relationship you have with the person who has died. It is natural to grieve and doesn't make you a weak person if you do experience deep feelings of loss, sadness and hurt. Sometimes people think of a grief being a "monument" to the person who has died.

We can feel a sense of loss and grief in a range of situations of loss. It is important to recognise grief and to let the feelings of grief be acknowledged. Sometimes we hide grief – grief which we think others wouldn't understand or is over something that is more distanced from us rather than a close relationship. Sometimes we hide grief because of stigma – people who have not been able to be open about their sexuality for example sometimes hide their grief for fear of stigma. Grief that is hidden and not talked about can lead to poor mental wellbeing and emotional overwhelm.

Every journey with grief is different for each individual but there are some characteristics in common. Anger, depression, and denial are common. Some people take longer to accept the death of someone close than others will.

Acceptance of death is not the same as forgetting the person who has died but acceptance does help us move forwards in our life. Life is different after someone has died and we can learn to live with the difference and learn to live differently.

Helping someone living with grief

Listen to them and let the person express how they feel. It is more important to listen than to speak. We don't always know what to say but don't avoid a grieving person because you feel you don't know what to say. Simply being there, listening and being a friend is all that is required.

When talking with someone grieving keep your own stories about your personal experiences to a minimum and don't talk too much about yourself. Share memories if you have any of the person who has died and most of all encourage the person grieving to share their memories.

If it seems appropriate, signpost people to specialist help; there are a number of organisations that can help grieving people understand their feelings and reflect on their experiences. An FCN volunteer will be able to point you in the right direction. The organisation Mind has a useful list of information and support guides on their website: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/beravement/useful-contacts/



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GRIEF AND COVID 19 – a footnote

A large number of people have been bereaved as a result of the COVID virus. As well as this individual grieving there is also a kind of collective sense of grief and anxiety on a global basis associated with the COVID 19 pandemic.

"The virus is threatening every single person on Earth with myriad losses of every kind, from separation from loved ones to financial endangerment to canceled once-in-a-lifetime events and many, many more."

Dr Alan Wolfelt Center for Loss of Life transition Colorado

As well as the normal experiences associated with the loss of a loved one there are a number of additional issues facing people grieving because of the restrictions of movement and the rituals associated with funerals. Despite the collective sharing in the experiences surrounding death because of COVID individual experience of isolation and separation in the experience of grief can be enhanced. Finding a way of maintaining contact, and being a confidant/e and friend of a bereaved person at this time will take effort and time but will be essential to provide the support needed.

BEREAVEMENT AFTER A DEATH BY SUICIDE

Bereavement after suicide is sometimes referred to as grief with the volume turned up.

When a death by suicide occurs lots the effects are like a ripple on the water and lots of people can be affected and will face grief and bereavement. Survivors of bereavement after a death by suicide will grieve in different ways.

“What if” questions run alongside the grief Guilt and anger are common emotions. Anger can be directed to the person who has died but also to oneself for not being able to prevent the death.

The pain of grief after a death by suicide can be overwhelming; the pain can be increased by the shock of the death and the sense of not being able to “say goodbye”.

Never say I know how you feel even if you have experienced grief after a death by suicide you cannot know how another person is feeling.

Those who support people grieving following a death by suicide will need to be in for a long haul of providing a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on and a willingness to give practical and pastoral support.

In the case of suicide the largest public health problem is....the alleviation of the effects of stress in the survivor-victims of suicidal deaths whose lives and changed forever.. Edward Shneidman (*Psychologist 2018 – 2009*).