



# **BEREAVEMENT AND GRIEF**

Information on how you can navigate the  
grieving process.

# BEREAVEMENT AND GRIEF

## Some information from the Counselling & Mental Health Service

When someone we care about dies it is normal and healthy for us to grieve. Our feelings at this time may be among the most profound and painful we ever experience. They are a natural reaction and, if we are able to bear with them, they can help us to come to terms with what has happened. This period of mourning varies according to the individual circumstances.



## Grieving

There are a wide variety of feelings we can experience whilst grieving. Your own experience and combination of these will be unique - there is no right or wrong sequence.

Here are some of the most common feelings and reactions:

### Numbness

- You may not feel much at first, due to the shock, and you may feel bad about this.

### Disbelief

- You may not be able to believe that the person really has died; you may find yourself looking for them in familiar places or you may think you have seen them.

### Yearning

- You may ache with longing to be able to put the clock back and to be with the person again.

### Sadness

- You may feel “down” and tearful.

### Anger

- At whoever or whatever seems responsible for the death;
- At “Life” or “God” for the injustice and unfairness of it;
- At the dead person (which is more difficult to accept) for leaving or abandoning you;
- At other people for continuing to have fun, for appearing trivial or for not understanding your feelings.

## **Guilt**

- Regretting things you did or did not say, things you did or did not do;
- For surviving and being alive, when that person is not;
- For feeling relief, e.g. at the death of someone who was ill and suffering.

## **Fear**

- Because death has become more real and close to you;
- At your sense of your own mortality, causing you anxiety and panic;
- Of harm to yourself or others close to you;
- Of “going mad”, of being overwhelmed by your feelings.
- Of not being able to cope.
- Of losing hold of the image or memory of the person who died.

## **Shame**

- For being emotional (e.g. crying) or not;
- for feeling you are burdening friends and others with your unhappiness;
- for envying others who have not suffered your loss.

## **Loneliness**

- Feeling isolated by your grief; either wanting to avoid other people or feeling avoided by them;
- feeling no one can understand what you are going through;
- feeling that the loss has left a hole in your life and in you that will never be filled.

## **Apathy**

- No motivation to do anything and no concentration, so unable to do your work.

## **Depression**

- You may begin to feel utterly hopeless and in despair;
- That life is meaningless and pointless;
- That there is no future for you to look forward to;
- That you will never feel “all right” again;
- Also, you may start thinking about suicide.

**If you feel you are becoming depressed, arranging to see your GP or a counsellor can help. Reactions to grief can also manifest themselves physically and in your behaviour and thoughts. Some of the symptoms may include:**

### **Exhaustion**

- Due to being emotionally drained and worn out, or to lack of sleep.

### **Sleeplessness**

- You feel restless and your mind races and keeps you awake;
- Bad dreams disturb you in the night;
- You wake up early and can't get back to sleep again.

### **Loss of appetite**

- You may lose interest not only in eating, but also in sex, your appearance and previous pleasures.

### **Dizziness, shakes and palpitations**

- These are stress and anxiety symptoms.

### **Muscular Tensions**

- Head aches, neck ache, back ache.

## **HOW TO GET THROUGH**

Trust yourself: pay attention to your feelings and needs and treat these with respect.

You have been emotionally wounded, and the wound needs care and time for healing.

The following are ways of coping that others have found helpful.

### **Talking about it**

- With someone you trust (e.g. friend, relative, tutor, chaplain, counsellor):
- Share your feelings and thoughts with them;
- You may need to go through these again and again before you feel ready to move on. This is natural.

### **Expressing your emotions**

- Crying is a natural response to unhappiness and brings relief: often we hold back our tears, afraid of seeming weak, and imprison the grief inside us;
- Through some other outlet that feels right for you, such as: writing (poems, letters, diary), painting, modelling, playing music or sports.

In summary, it may help to:

- Express your feeling
- Talk to those who care
- Give yourself time

### **Remembering**

- Keeping a memento (a photograph, a piece of clothing, a special CD – or anything you treasure) can help your sense of staying close to the person you have lost;
- Making time to be with your memories of them on birthdays and anniversaries;
- Visiting places which remind you of them and times you spent together.

### **Try not to:**

- Bottle up your feelings
- Avoid the subject
- Expect feelings to pass quickly.

## Reality

- Attending funerals, returning to the scene and talking to people who know what happened are all ways that help to make the situation become more credible, real and easier to bear.

## Taking care of yourself

- Warning: Drive with extra care. Be more careful generally. Accidents are more common after severe stress. You may find it harder to concentrate and focus.

## Circumstances affecting the grieving process:

1. Where the death was expected and acknowledged, the grieving process can begin before the loss: there is time to prepare and say goodbye.
2. When the death occurs unexpectedly and shockingly, as in the case of an accident or suicide, or if it involves a child or a young person, the impact may be more disturbing and long-lasting. If you did not have the chance to say goodbye to the person who has died, it may be helpful to attend the funeral or remembrance service and to say it there.
3. The death of a child is especially hard. Bereaved parents can find contact with others very helpful. See contacts at the end.
4. Also, if feelings and thoughts well up unexpectedly from an earlier death or loss you have experienced, these may complicate and deepen your grief, and it may be beneficial to talk these through with a counsellor.

# THE END OF GRIEF

Gradually, the intensity of your feelings of grief will begin to lessen and your constant thoughts about the person who has died will become interspersed with periods of forgetfulness, where other thoughts break through and gain your attention. Sometimes, you may feel guilty about this, as if it means the person is becoming less important to you already. Yet, this isn't so, for our thoughts of the people we care about come and go quite naturally through the day and we do not love or value them any less in the intervals.

After a while, your sense of hopefulness about the future will start to come back and you may feel more like your "old self", with your interest in life and other people returning. Even so, the experience you have been through may affect your values and beliefs, deepening your responses to others and to the spiritual questions of our existence.

The tide of your grief is ebbing, but individual waves of sadness and hurt may flood through you again from time to time - perhaps on an anniversary or at a piece of music or a place that reminds you of your loss.

In the end, while picking up the threads of your everyday life once more, you are able to reconnect with the death of the person you cared about. You hold them safe inside you, together with the memory of who they were and what they mean to you.

# WHEN TO SEEK EXTRA HELP

The normal process of grieving and healing may become stuck or unbearable. If you feel this happening to you, don't hesitate to ask for help.

For example:

1. If you find you are unable to work (no motivation, no concentration), talk to your personal tutor or any member of departmental staff you feel comfortable with. Departments can be supportive in practical ways, once they understand your situation.
2. If physical symptoms persist or alarm you, arrange to see your GP.
3. If your sleeplessness, lack of appetite and low mood continue, again speak to your doctor or counsellor. You may have developed depressive illness and they can help.
4. If your feelings of despair and hopelessness become overwhelming and you begin to feel suicidal arrange to speak to your GP.
5. Similarly, if nightmares or traumatic images persist or if you experience panic attacks and feelings of extreme anxiety, consult a counsellor. (n.b. Relationship difficulties or sexual problems can increase your level of anxiety, and these may benefit from counselling).
6. Finally, if you continue to feel numb, empty and unable to grieve, or if you find you are drinking, smoking, taking drugs or keeping busy to excess, in order to avoid the pain of your feelings, exploring these issues with a counsellor can be helpful.

## **Remember:**

**Your grief will have an end and you will start to feel happier and more hopeful again.**

**In the meantime, help is here if you need it - do ask.**

## **If someone you know is bereaved it is helpful to:**

1. Understand and trust the process - remembering that grieving is a natural and healing process, which unfurls in its own time.
2. Be with the person - staying with and acknowledging their feelings, whatever these may be; sometimes, simply sitting with them in silence or holding their hand.
3. Listen - calmly, patiently, empathically, without searching for solutions.
4. Ask the bereaved person if they would like to talk about the one they've lost and showing interest - for example, sharing photos and anecdotes.
5. Know and accept your own limits - allowing time and space for your own needs.
6. Have someone else to talk to - being able to share with another what you are going through.
7. The bereaved person may welcome practical help for a while; shopping, cooking, etc. They may feel 'fuzzy headed' and have difficulty concentrating and reading, etc.

## Unhelpful:

1. Wanting to cure the bereaved person.
2. Wanting to speed up the process.
3. Looking on the bright side.
4. Encouraging a 'stiff upper lip'.
5. Trying to 'jolly' them along.
6. Offering advice.
7. Avoiding the subject in case it upsets the bereaved and allowing it to become 'taboo'.
8. Feeling responsible.
9. Wanting to do too much.
10. Bearing the other person's grief alone.

## USEFUL INFORMATION

### Useful Websites

[www.studentsagainstdepression.org](http://www.studentsagainstdepression.org)  
Student Mental Health website -  
[www.thinkpositive.scot](http://www.thinkpositive.scot)

### Self Help Resources

Living life to the full -  
<http://www.llttf.com>

Mental Health Foundation website with excellent podcast downloads -  
<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

### Helplines

If you want to talk to someone about your emotional difficulties and are feeling despairing or suicidal there is help day and night. You can contact:

#### Breathing Space –

<https://breathingspace.scot/>  
Tel – 0800 838587

#### The Samaritans –

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) , Tel – 116 123

#### Saneline – <http://www.sane.org.uk/>

[what\\_we\\_do/support/helpline](http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/helpline)  
Tel – 0845 678 000

#### Give us a shout – TEXT '85258

Here for you 24/7

<https://giveusashout.org/>

## STUDENT COUNSELLING & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

### How to make contact

The Counselling Service is part of Student Services based at the Library. Counselling is free and available to all registered students. Appointments are available on weekdays from 9.00am to 6.00pm throughout the year, you can book an appointment by emailing [counselling@abertay.ac.uk](mailto:counselling@abertay.ac.uk). Alternatively, speak to staff at the Support Enquiry Zone (SEZ) on level 1 of the Library.

The service also includes a Mental Health Nurse Advisor (RNHM) who can work with you if you are experiencing or are concerned about any diagnosed mental health issues.

The Student Counselling & Mental Health Service is open Monday to Friday, 9.00am - 5.00pm all year round, except when the University is closed during the Christmas vacation. The University believes that all employees and students have the right to expect, and that it has a responsibility to ensure, that no individual will be disadvantaged as a consequence of their age; disability; gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins); religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation.



## **Contact:**

Student Enquiry Zone (SEZ), Level 1,  
The Library Building,  
Abertay University,  
Bell Street, Dundee DD1 1HG

**Tel:** 01382 308805/01382 308833

**E-mail:** [counselling@abertay.ac.uk](mailto:counselling@abertay.ac.uk)

## **Equality Statement**

The University Equality Policy  
can be found at:

[http://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/  
theuni/diversity/](http://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/theuni/diversity/)