

Bereavement

When someone important to us dies, we all experience the reactions and feelings that we call grief. Grief is painful and stressful, but it is our normal reaction to loss.

There are no hard and fast rules about grief. Each of us may respond differently to the death of someone we knew, and we may even be surprised at our response, which may be greater or lesser than we expect. No responses are 'wrong' or 'right'; we all have to grieve in our own time and our own way. So, for example, some people may cry, others may not. The length of time that it takes us to recover is individual too. In addition, our reaction may not be directly proportional to the closeness of our relationship to the person who has died because it will be affected by the impact it has on us as individuals and by other experiences.

When someone dies, we may experience many different reactions. Some common ones are:

Strong emotional responses: we may find that they change regularly, perhaps from hour to hour or day to day. Some days may be very difficult to get through, others we will consider to be good days. As we progress with our grieving we would expect that difficult days will gradually feature less and less

Shock and disbelief: since this is something that you don't want to believe, it is not surprising that it can take time before you accept that this loss has happened.

Guilt & regret: it is very normal to feel bad about things you did or said that now come to mind, or for things you feel you could or should have done, or for feeling angry. Sometimes people have what is called 'survivor guilt' at being the one still alive.

Anger: with the world or with others for causing or not being able to prevent the loss, or for not seeming to understand how the loss has impacted on you.

Unfairness: a strong sense of the injustice of the loss.

Physical reactions: loss of appetite, inability to sleep, agitation, preoccupation and lack of ability to concentrate.

Taking care of ourselves

- Accept that what we are going through is normal and part of our healing process
- Allow ourselves to cry and accept all our feelings as normal
- Take time off from studies, go and stay with friends or family and don't expect that working extra to make up for lack of concentration will be productive
- Be kind to ourselves. Rest, eat sensibly, relax and exercise
- Talk to someone we trust about how we are feeling and about the person who has died
- Avoid using alcohol, drugs or excessive prescribed medication
- Grieving is a powerful but normal experience. If after time, it doesn't lessen, seek professional help.

For further information, consult the Counselling Service website or visit:

www.cruse.org.uk (Cruse Bereavement Care)

www.uk-sobs.org.uk (for survivors of bereavement through suicide)

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