

Bereavement during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Grief is a natural reaction to the loss of a loved one. Common feelings are disbelief, distress, sadness, and being tearful. Yearning or longing for the deceased may feel excruciating.

In the early days and weeks after bereavement, the body reacts with a state of shock and tension making it hard to relax, sleep and eat. Normal routines can be difficult and concentration and decision-making may be affected.

Over the following weeks and months, you may struggle to adapt to everyday life without the deceased person. People cope in many different ways.

There is a long tradition of coming together when there is serious illness and in the days after a death. Families take the time for rituals such as funerals, burials or cremations. They arrange farewell rituals, such as social gatherings, sharing meals and paying tribute to the person who has died by sharing stories and memories. These rituals and activities often provide comfort and support as well as a familiar framework to manage the effects of the loss.

Changes during COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing our traditional ways of marking our losses, and the ways in which we voice our grief. Physical distancing means that our existing practices of saying goodbye are disrupted, and rituals and traditions that offer people an opportunity to share thoughts and feelings are changed.

How to Help Yourself

- It is normal to react to loss. Be kind and tolerant with yourself. Allow yourself to feel and react in ways that are natural for you.
- In the days after the loss, your body might react. Take good care of yourself. Try to use helpful strategies to restore sleep and be able to relax. Remember to keep hydrated and try and keep to regular and healthy mealtimes to restore your body.
- Try to keep your daily activities and keep routines as normal as you can. Regular bedtimes and getting-up times can be of help, as well as exercising or going out in the garden, or for a walk if possible.

- Be mindful not to become emotionally isolated. Even if people cannot visit, or if the funeral or memorial service was different than you expected, allow others to offer their condolences and show support in different ways. Phone calls are still possible as well as emails, letters and messages through social media.
- Stay in contact with the people closest to you. Even though you cannot be physically near each other. Reach out to them and keep conversations going through the telephone or other media. A regular flow of communication can remind you that you are not alone and that people are thinking of you and are there for you.
- If you or your support network cannot attend a funeral or memorial service, it is still possible to feel part of the event by setting up video recordings, or a live stream and participation by online platforms.
- Be mindful of setting time aside for a private goodbye. Look at pictures, light a candle, create a digital slideshow or sing and play music together online. Arrange a private memorial service for later when it is possible.
- Remember it is ok to ask for help. Even though many people are struggling, your own feelings are valid. Be mindful that you ask for the care and attention you need. Sharing your thoughts and feelings and listening to the experience of others can be helpful.
- Limit distress. For instance, minimize how much news and social media you watch and read about COVID-19 that causes you to feel anxious or worried, to avoid additional stress. Try to seek information only from trusted sources and take steps to protect yourself and your loved ones.
- Make room for your grief by setting aside time to let it out. Even though this may feel very hard to do because it is painful, grief is better out than in. Grieving is an important task and making time to grieve in your day enables you to pay attention to it in a positive and purposeful way. Plan a specific time each day, or every other day, to think about the death of your loved one. This will help you feel more in control of your grief. Choose a time when you won't be interrupted and sit quietly with your eyes closed. Play music, 'talk' to them about your day, allow yourself to cry, write a journal, look at photos, write them a letter, make a 'to-do' list of things that you need to do, read self-help books or join a support group online.

Additional help and information:

Please see our '**Manifestations of Grief**' booklet.

<https://springhill.org.uk/bereavement-counselling-and-support-service>

Cruse Bereavement Care - 0808 808 1677 - www.cruse.org.uk

National Bereavement Alliance – www.nationalbereavementalliance.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK - www.childbereavementuk.org

The Compassionate Friends - www.tcf.org.uk

Samaritans - 116 123 - www.samaritans.org

Book: **An Introduction to Coping with Grief, 2nd Edition by Sue Morris**

www.reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/mental-health/common-feelings-and-experiences/16494812