

# Bereavement

Bereavement is a term which can be used to describe any loss in life but most commonly it is used to describe the death of someone we love and therefore it is practically a universal experience since, sooner or later, someone we love will die. Everyone deals with bereavement differently and there is no right way to deal with it and no defined time in which to do it. We cannot begin to understand it until we have experienced it ourselves and, even then, it is difficult to understand the grief of others because so much depends on the relationship a person had with the deceased person.

Dealing with bereavement is never easy even when it has been experienced before. So much depends on how the person died, suddenly or after a long illness, whether the person was old or young, whether we were close to them or not, whether our relationship was good or bad at the time of their death and during their life, whether we can freely express or share our emotions and how we are both physically and emotionally when the other person dies.

Many people describe being shocked and numbed when they hear of a death. Everything seems unreal and sometimes reality only strikes when they attend the funeral or return home to an empty house. Feelings of guilt or anger often replace the numbness and many people find it difficult to begin life again and also to sleep. There may be depression for a time and for those unable to progress through their grief and move on counselling may become necessary either on a one to one basis or in a group.

Religious faith and spirituality often help people to cope with bereavement. Belief in life after death or the possibility of being reunited one day with a loved one can give comfort to the bereaved. Well planned funerals or rituals common in different cultures also help the bereaved to be more at peace. Many faith groups now organise bereavement counselling either for individuals or in groups. Hospices often provide on-going bereavement care for families whose loved ones have been in their care.

Giving support to the bereaved can be difficult because today in many cultures death and dying are almost taboo words. Many people feel they do not know what to say to someone who has been bereaved and they cannot cope with sudden displays of raw emotion.

Family members are sometimes so caught up in being supportive to one another that they themselves do not deal with their own grief and there can also be situations in which different members of the family are at very different stages of the grief process.

Reading about grief in books and online can be helpful to many and sharing experiences with others can give mutual support and understanding. Bereavement and grieving are natural processes which take time to deal with and only the bereaved person will really know when they are able not to forget but to cherish their memories and move on.

**Helplines**

*Bereavement Advice Centre Helpline* – 0800 634 9494

*Cruse Bereavement Care Helpline* – 0808 88 1677

[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

*Samaritans Helpline* – 116123

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**Websites for further help and information**

[www.counselling-directory.org.uk/bereavement.html](http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/bereavement.html)