

Taking care of yourself during a bereavement



Talk about how you are feeling

Try talking to a friend you trust about how you are feeling - this can relieve some of the pressure and help you feel more supported. Being open with family and friends can also be helpful. Don't isolate yourself - just being with others who care about you can be a comfort.



Don't hide your emotions

Grief is a natural response to losing someone. Don't be embarrassed to show emotion - it's completely normal. Children will often learn behaviour from adults. If the people around them hide their feelings, they may feel unable to show their grief or talk about the person they have lost. There are different ways of expressing your emotions - you may find writing down your feelings can help or write a letter to your loved one saying the things you never got to say.



Look after your physical health and take time to relax

Experiencing the pain of bereavement can put great pressure on your physical health and reduce your energy levels as well.

It's important to try and look after yourself and your health during this difficult time:

- **Try to eat well** - in the early days after a bereavement you may not feel like cooking or eating but eating properly is important to staying healthy. Try to eat balanced meals with fresh vegetables and don't rely too much on sugar or junk food for a comfort boost.
- **Take regular moderate exercise** - 30 minutes every day can help you feel calmer and increase your energy. Find something easy like a gentle walk outside or a stroll in the garden.
- **Don't drink too much caffeine, cut back on smoking and avoid alcohol** - don't use alcohol to try to feel better or to try to forget. Drinking too much will only create other problems. Drink plenty of water or herbal teas instead.
- **Try to get a good night's sleep** - getting enough rest can help you feel stronger and cope better. It can be hard to sleep when you're grieving - try to go to bed at a regular time and create a routine which helps you relax. Avoid alcohol and caffeine at night.
- **Take time to relax** - practising relaxation and breathing techniques can help you feel calmer and improve sleep.



Accept any offers of help

There are lots of practical things that need doing when someone dies. You will also still need to eat and take care of some routine chores. If family or friends offer to help or cook meals for you - accept their help. People often want to help but don't know how, let them know what they can do - whether it's help organising the funeral, running some errands or just being there to listen as you talk things through.



Ask for help if you need it

If you are struggling to cope or feeling very low or hopeless - talk to your GP or you can find people to talk to on MindWell in Need urgent help?. You can also find help with practical issues such as money worries and benefit issues at www.mindwellleeds.org.uk/practical-help



Be patient with yourself

Grieving takes time. There is no timeframe for how long the grieving process should last and everyone is different. Some people may start to feel better in a few weeks or months - other people may take one to two years or more. Don't expect too much too soon. There will be lots of ups and downs. Good days and bad. If you are having a bad day, it's OK to take some time out and look after yourself. Take it one hour at a time if you need to. If you are having a good day - don't feel guilty.



Don't make any big decisions too soon

Don't rush into making any big life changes until you are ready. Don't enter into new financial arrangements without considering your options.

www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk/money-issues



Try to get back to old routines and stay connected

Putting some structure into your day can help you feel more in control. Make plans and write lists if it helps. Try to get back to some of your old hobbies or interests. Taking up a new hobby or learning something new can be restful and relieve stress. Accept invitations, invite people to visit and keep in touch with family and friends. Or you could join a local club or support group where you can connect with people with similar experiences.

www.mindwellleeds.org.uk/peer-support



Plan for key dates

No matter how many months or years go by birthdays, anniversaries, family celebrations and holidays will always be difficult and will re-awaken memories and feelings of loss. Try to be prepared for the emotions that will come. Plan ahead and look for ways of remembering and celebrating the person you have lost. Take time out to look after yourself during emotional times, if you need it.



Keep memories alive

It's really important to keep memories of your loved one alive.

There are lots of ways you can do this:

- Talk about the good times with family and friends.
- Put out pictures of your loved one to help you think about the happy times you spent together.
- Put together a scrap book or photo album celebrating the life of your loved one.
- Create a 'memory jar' - write down precious memories (however small) on pieces of paper and keep them in a jar so that they are never lost.
- Create a 'memory box' - put together a special box (could be hand-painted or decorated) with a collection of mementos (letters, cards, CDs, drawings and photos) which you can keep to open and look at, whenever you want to, for years to come.
- Some people like to wear a piece of clothing (such as a scarf) that belonged to the person who died or wear their perfume or aftershave.
- You could also get involved with a cause or organisation that was important to your loved one.

If you are feeling very anxious - you can find some quick and easy self-help techniques that you can do now on MindWell at www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk/quick-self-help