

GRIEF AND LOSS

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“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear”

CS Lewis

Bereavement is the period after a loss. **Grief** is the internal experience of loss, and **mourning** is the outward expression of loss.

Grief is a very complicated process and therefore there is no 'normal' reaction. You can grieve for the loss of a person, loss of health, or when a loved one has been given a diagnosis of terminal illness. Grief can be experienced *emotionally, physically, mentally* and through the *things you do or don't do*.

Emotionally: You may feel anger, sadness, guilt, denial, heightened anxiety, depressed mood, intense distress.

Physically: You may experience muscle tightness, hollowness in the stomach, lacking in energy.

Mentally: You may have intrusive thoughts - those thoughts or images that no matter how hard you try they just don't seem to go away. Being preoccupied with thoughts of the deceased is a normal reaction, and can range from painful recollections to attempting to make sense of the loss. Periods of disbelief occur particularly in the aftermath of loss.

Things you do or don't do: You may stop seeing people and stop going to certain places. Avoidance of reminders of the deceased person is normal. You may find it harder to concentrate, and feel more forgetful. You may experience sleep disturbance.

How much grief is normal?

There is no right way and no wrong way to grieve, no prescription for how to grieve. There are vast differences among how individuals experience grief/bereavement. Responses will vary from one person to another and according to

the circumstances surrounding a death. Losses that result from sudden or violent deaths are likely to instigate traumatic reactions and may take longer to adapt to. Grief is a process that involves adaptations to the changed world with no determined length of time.

There are 3 common patterns of adaptation to loss. Some individuals go through our culturally expected pattern moving from high to low stress over time. Others can have low levels of distress after the loss and at later stages. Others can continue in a state of high distress for much longer than they expected, and depression can occur after any form of loss.

Should I be going through 'stages' of grief?

The following (stages) are common experiences that may not follow any order -You may recognise some, all or none as a reflection of your own grieving process:

- Denial-when life makes no sense, you try to find a way to get through the day
- Anger-underneath anger is pain, this can be felt towards self or others.
- Bargaining-'if only', 'what if' -you want life to be like it was or to go back in time.
- Depression-empty feelings, withdrawal from others
- Acceptance-you learn to accept the reality that your loved one, colleague, friend, has gone, though when you begin to restore life for yourself you can often feel like you are betraying the deceased person.

How to manage when experiencing grief-will I get over it?

There is no normal or standard process of coping with grief. Some talk with others and share their memories and others avoid focusing on it.

There are various ways of maintaining

the bonds with our deceased such as memorials, donations, writings, photographs, and rituals. Some have a religious or philosophical outlook on life that enables them to cope with their experience. Others may find that their coping resources such as social supports and healthy coping styles can protect them from distress to some level.

Sometimes we can find meaning or make sense of what happened, and sometimes we cannot. Individuals are not always able to achieve resolution regarding their loss and to come up with an explanation for the experience which is satisfying to them.

More than 40% of those who had suddenly lost a spouse agreed with this statement 'It's not real, I feel that I'll wake up and it won't be true'.

Points of help:

Many people move through the grieving process and can continue to reengage in family/social/work life, and others can feel stuck. It is important to know when you need additional help. You might need help if you can't get out of bed; if you are neglecting yourself or your family; if you feel like you can't go on without the person you have lost, or if the emotion is so intense it's affecting the rest of your life.

PRRT has Psychological Therapists who have experience of working with a wide range of difficulties. Based at Maryfield we also have clinics in the Coleraine and Enniskillen areas. Please contact **028 90427788** for further details or to make an appointment. **CRUSE** is a specialist service for bereaved individuals and they have supportive services for young people also. They can be contacted via freephone on **0808 808 1677** (Mon and Tues 9.30-5pm, Wed, Thurs and Fri 9.30 to 8pm) and via their website.

PRRT is based at Maryfield, Holywood and provides psychology, physiotherapy, personal development and training to the retired and serving police population. PSNI employees can access our healthcare services via referrals from PSNI occupational health. Serving officers can access personal development and training directly. For further information or to make an appointment please call 028 9042 7788 or email: servicesadmin@prrt.org.



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