

Bereavement and loss

What do we mean by bereavement?

This leaflet addresses the issues and feelings that may come up following the death of someone who was important to you. Although most of us will have this experience, it is often not something we think about much until it happens to us, and we can feel unprepared and thrown off balance by the intensity of our feelings when someone close to us dies.

Some of the information in this leaflet may well be relevant to those undergoing other types of loss; the feelings experienced, for example, after the breakup of a relationship, parents divorcing or an abortion or miscarriage can be similar to those felt after a death.

Feelings you may have when someone dies

We all need to grieve in our own way and in our own time. Below are set out some of the feelings and behaviour that are often experienced, sometimes in quick succession – you may find you feel very volatile.

shock and disbelief: you may feel numb and be unable to take in what has happened – even if you knew the person was very ill

anxious and panicky: sometimes in situations that wouldn't normally bother you

guilt and regret: whether for things you wish you'd said and done (or not done) or for just being alive; these feelings are particularly strong when someone has committed suicide

an overwhelming sense of loss and sadness: sometimes you may feel as though a part of yourself has been lost

depressed: feelings of wanting to withdraw from family and friends; at times you may feel despairing, that there is no point in going on

anger and rage: some of this may relate to feeling out of control, that everything is chaotic

a sense of injustice and envy of those who aren't suffering in this way

relief particularly if the person who has died was suffering a great deal

In addition you may find yourself affected in some of the following ways:

- **sleep disturbance:** it may be difficult to get to sleep, stay asleep or you may wake early
- **loss of appetite**
- **restless, agitated and panicky** to the point where you feel you're going mad (these feelings are very common), together with a sense of foreboding
- **preoccupied:** unable to get the dead person out of your mind; you may dream about them or imagine you see them or hear them
- **unable to concentrate,** inability to cope with everyday life, including the demands of your university work
- **irritable,** tearful and exhausted.

Other physical symptoms may be present; you may feel dizzy, sick, have a raised heart beat or have digestive problems. If you are concerned, consult your GP or health adviser.

What might help

if possible, **talk to a sympathetic listener** – it will help you to clarify your feelings and you'll feel supported and less alone.

try to accept the range of feelings and reactions you have, and where possible, allow yourself to express them; many people find that they cry a lot at times and that this is helpful in letting the feelings out

let your tutors know what has happened, if your work is affected; you need their understanding and help in planning your studies

accept that grieving can be a long process, and that it can't be hurried; it may take two years or more before you can feel that you are beginning to come to terms with your loss. Anniversaries, Christmas and other events may all be painful times.

Additional help

If you find it hard to talk to friends and family, it may help to talk to a counsellor (see below for telephone numbers). Everyone's circumstances are unique, and this will enable you to have some time and space to think about what has happened and how it is affecting you. If you are worried by physical symptoms or continue to find eating and sleeping difficult, speak to your GP or a health adviser.

It is particularly important to seek help if you continue to feel hopeless, despairing or suicidal.

Useful contacts

Cruse:

0808 808 1677

Enfield Bereavement Service:

020 8367 1863

Barnet Bereavement Service:

020 8441 3572

Miscarriage Association

01924 200799

Sands (Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity)

0808 164 3332

Compassionate Friends:

(Help and support for bereaved parents from parents who have had this experience) 0345 123 2304

How to contact the Counselling and Mental Health Service

Please see website for up-to-date service details:

<http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/cmh>

The UniHelp Desk will be happy to tell you where to find the Counselling service or you can contact us at:

cmh@mdx.ac.uk

Further leaflets in this series

- Abuse
- Addictive behaviour
- Anxiety and Panic
- Coming to Britain to study
- Coping with trauma
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Exam anxiety
- Helping someone you are concerned about
- Managing stress
- Mature students
- Mental health
- Presentation skills
- Relaxation
- Work difficulties and study blocks
- Working in groups

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