

## Factsheet: Bereavement

Bereavement means “to be deprived by death”, and the bereaved can be deprived in many ways, depending on the circumstances of the death and the relationship with the deceased. They may feel deprived of hope, the future, peace of mind, financial security or the chance to say goodbye or to put things right. Death represents a particular loss and the grieving process comes from this.

### The Five Stages Of Grief

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, the author of *On Death and Dying*, sets out the Five Stages of Grief as follows:



It is important to emphasise that these stages are only part of the framework of learning to live with bereavement. They are tools that may be helpful in framing and identifying some of the emotions but they are not defined, definite stages. Not everyone goes through all five stages, nor is the progression through them always linear – people can move from Stage One to Four and back through Stage Two, for example. Each individual grieves in their way.

It can be helpful to set out some of the emotions, physical symptoms and behaviours associated with grief. We need to also bear in mind that there can also be anticipatory grief where a death is expected, for example a person with a terminal illness or advanced old age.

### Emotions Associated with Grief

- SHOCK** Disbelief is one of the first emotions particularly if the death is unexpected
- DENIAL** Inability to accept the reality of the death
- NUMBNESS** Feeling like running on auto-pilot
- ANGER** Why me? Why did they have to die?
- DEPRESSION** Feeling lost, helpless, despairing
- GUILT** The ‘what ifs’ and ‘if onlys’
- ACCEPTANCE** Beginning to accept the reality of the death (this does not cancel out the sorrow or sense of loss.)

### Physical Symptoms Associated with Grief

The mind and body are inextricably linked, and bereavement can have physical effects too:

- ▶ Loss of appetite or an urge to over-eat
- ▶ Weakness or light-headedness
- ▶ Hypersensitivity to noise, light, smells
- ▶ Problems sleeping
- ▶ Breathlessness or a sense of having a stone in the chest
- ▶ Visual or auditory hallucinations

The last symptom is very common, where the bereaved person feels that the deceased is present, may hear their voice, laughter or smell their scent or imagine that they see them in a crowd. Our senses do play tricks on us, particularly in traumatic situations such as bereavement.

## Behaviours Associated with Grief

- ▶ Restlessness and over-activity
- ▶ Visiting places the deceased may have liked
- ▶ Sitting in their bedroom for long periods of time
- ▶ Absent-mindedness or a feeling of not being in complete control

Many of these will pass with time. If any become chronic or start affecting the health of the bereaved person, medical help is advised.

## How to Help Yourself

- ▶ Try to regulate your sleep if it becomes an issue
- ▶ Take care of your health as best you can
- ▶ Be gentle with yourself, acknowledge that you need to be patient
- ▶ Leave major decisions until you begin to feel more like yourself
- ▶ Accept help from friends particularly practical help such as meal preparation, a lift to work etc
- ▶ Use whatever resources help, but be wary of mediums or spiritualists
- ▶ If rituals help, such as visiting the grave, going on a favourite walk or lighting a candle, do embrace them.

## Life Post Bereavement

Life does go on. Grief is not something you “get over”, rather it becomes part of you that will become integrated into who you are. To grieve indicates that you cared about the deceased, and it is an entirely natural reaction.

There will always be memories and anniversaries, but eventually you will adapt to a changed life with different relationships and perspectives. If you feel you cannot move on, please seek help as acute, unaddressed grief can be detrimental to both mental and physical health.

## Other Sources of Help

Bereavement Ireland runs The Bereavement Counselling Service (BCS), a group of volunteers recruited and trained in the theory of grief and the counselling of bereaved individuals. The BCS was formed in 1982 by a group of professionals with backgrounds in psychiatry, medicine, social work, nursing and psychology who were concerned about the lack of support available for those who had experienced bereavement.

The charity is based in Dublin but operates at several centres in the greater Dublin area, also Bray, Newbridge, Carlow. It has a useful website with downloadable guides including:

- ▶ Helping the bereaved return to the workplace
- ▶ Grieving the death by suicide of a loved one
- ▶ Anticipatory Grief
- ▶ Grieving the death of a parent in adult life

Bereavement Ireland **01 8391766**, email [bereavement@eircom.net](mailto:bereavement@eircom.net)

You may prefer to source in-depth specialist counselling to help you come to terms with the bereavement and its effects. LawCare suggests you find a qualified counsellor via a reputable website such as the IACP [www.iacp.ie](http://www.iacp.ie)

You may also find the LawCare FactSheet entitled: **Counselling** a useful resource.

### Specialist services

**Pieta**: Freecall, 24/7, on **1800 247247**

Pieta provides a free, therapeutic approach to people in suicidal distress and those who engage in self-harm.

### Turn the Tide

Co-founded in 2003 by psychiatrist, Professor Kevin Malone and Irish businessman/solicitor, Noel Smyth this site offers a wealth of information on suicide. It also provides advice and support on recognizing the signs and symptoms of Mental Health problems.