

What helps when someone close to you has died?

A Guide for Young People (11-25 years)

Understanding your feelings and reactions

When someone close to you dies it is usual to feel very shocked and deeply distressed. Everyone is different but it is likely that you may experience some of the following:

- ◆ A sense of numbness or unreality
- ◆ Frequent crying or not shedding any tears at all
- ◆ Mood swings involving strong emotions
- ◆ Guilt that you did not prevent the death in some way
- ◆ Blame; blaming yourself or others for not preventing the death
- ◆ Feeling out of control, or that you are going mad
- ◆ Difficulty dropping off to sleep and nightmares or very vivid dreams once asleep
- ◆ Loss of appetite or excessive comfort eating
- ◆ Thinking that you have seen or heard the person who has died
- ◆ Feelings of deep sadness

All these feelings and reactions are normal and will become less acute over time.

Do not be afraid to ask questions

It usually helps to find out how the person died. If there is an opportunity to see the body or visit the place where the person died, this can help you absorb the reality of what has happened.

If family members can't answer your questions, try asking the family doctor. Alternatively an adult who will listen to your questions might be able to find out the answers for you.

Involvement in the funeral

Attending the funeral is a way of saying goodbye, together with the family and friends of the person who died. Prepare yourself for the funeral by finding out what is likely to happen.

If the person who died is a member of your family or a close friend, you may wish to be involved in planning the funeral by, e.g., choosing a piece of music or writing something. Some people write a letter to the person who died or a poem about them. You could also ask to read this out at the funeral or ask someone to read it out for you.

Remembering the person who died

It can be comforting to talk a lot about the person who has died; sharing memories with family and friends. Asking for a possession of theirs to have as a keepsake can also help. Some people make a collection of photos into a special album to remember the person who died. Others make up a collection of objects or songs to serve as a reminder.

Contact with other bereaved young people

You can sometimes feel isolated or different from other young people when someone close to you has died. Whilst no one can ever know exactly how you feel, there will be other young people who have been bereaved living in your community. A local hospice may be able to put you in touch with others by providing somewhere for you to meet together.

How others can help

Your friends will want to help but probably do not know how. Sometimes just being with you and saying nothing may help. People who have been bereaved often say they want to be treated the same as ever but need their friends to let them know that they have heard about the person's death and are sorry.

It is likely that your studies or work may be affected and if you are taking exams or being assessed in some way, teaching staff or employers need to know that you have been bereaved. This may be difficult to do yourself, so ask a friend or family member to do it for you.

Looking after yourself

This may seem unimportant but taking extra care and eating regularly may guard against accidents and illness. Do not expect too much of yourself as you are likely to be preoccupied with remembering the person who has died and absorbing the shock of their death.

Resuming day to day routines and activities

Returning to school/college or work may help you to feel a sense of normality. Try not to feel guilty about taking part in activities such as sports or even social events. It is okay to enjoy yourself again and even to laugh. It is very unlikely that the person who died would want you to be sad all the time.

Talking to family and friends usually helps. However, if you are not able to do this, for whatever reason, there are other people who may be able to support you:

- ◆ 'Elephants Never Forget' at The Severn Hospice – 01743 236565 Telford (01952) 221350
- ◆ Hope House Children's Hospice - -01691 671999
- ◆ Lifelines (Shropshire) for intensive therapeutic support 01743 210940
- ◆ CRUSE Bereavement Care e-mail helpline@crusebereavementcare.org.uk Shropshire 0845 606 6812
- ◆ Child Death Helpline – Freephone service for anyone affected by the death of a child - 0800 282986 <http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk/>
- ◆ The Samaritans – 0845 7909090

If after several weeks or even months, you are feeling no better, or dwelling on the circumstances of the person's death you may need some professional help for yourself and your family:

- ◆ If you are either 16 years and under or 18 years and under and still in full-time education, your family doctor can refer you to the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

- ◆ If you are over 18 years your family doctor. can refer you to the Adult Mental Health Service.

- ◆ Alternatively if you are still at school, your teachers may be able to access support from the Educational Psychology Service – 01952 385216.