



Your first steps to  
**Bereavement  
Support**



# Grief is a very natural, normal and necessary reaction to a bereavement

Explore our website to find out more about how we could help you, or call our advice line

01233 504127

This booklet can help you to recognise how grief might be affecting you and to understand that although it can seem overwhelming at times, it is perfectly normal to feel this way when you are adjusting to living with a loss.

## No one finds it easy

Death is part of our life, facing the loss of someone we love is never easy. We all know that people have to die, but we prefer not to think about it until we have to face the reality of someone close to us having a serious illness. A death may be sudden and unexpected, leaving us totally unprepared. There may, however, be a warning. There may be time to make some adjustments, but the grief which follows is no less painful. We are left feeling numb and believing that our lives have lost their direction and purpose.

Sorrow and grief are deeply painful, and no one can really prepare us for them. We feel that no one else can understand how much we hurt inside. But the pain and the sorrow are the price we pay for loving, and the love goes on even though death has intervened.

## The grieving process

Grief is not a single event. It is a process which takes time to work through, during which we find out how to adapt to our loss.

### *There is no right way or wrong way to grieve*

Our feelings of grief are as personal and individual as any other feelings.

Grief brings feelings to the surface; crying helps us to express our emotions freely and openly and can be very helpful and healing.

The strong feelings we have had for our loved ones remain and give rise to our sorrow which is natural.

## Feelings

The sorts of feelings people have do not follow any consistent pattern, but usually include some of the following; they can appear at any time and in any order. Perhaps you began by feeling numb, unable to accept the reality of the loss, wanting to cry but not being able to. Perhaps you could not believe it could happen to you. Or you may have had the opposite reaction, weeping at the slightest provocation and crying yourself to sleep at night. You will almost certainly ache inside, and feel nothing can be the same again. You may feel you cannot go out on your own and feel afraid of meeting new people or of answering the telephone, or you may just want to sit and look at photographs.

You may even feel as if your loved one is going to walk through the door at any moment, and find yourself making plans as if they were still here with you.

Maybe you keep asking 'why'? Feeling angry about a life cut short and being denied time together, or even blaming yourself for something done or left undone. All these things are normal and usual.

### *The pain and the sorrow are the price we pay for loving*

When these feelings come over you, you may feel dreadfully alone and without help. Even if you have a strong faith, you may not find it a comfort at this time. All of these feelings are not only natural, but common in grief.

Bereavement is one of the hardest things to have to cope with. That you feel ill, off-balance, unable to sleep at night and fearful of the future is hardly surprising when you are faced with what is possibly the biggest change you have ever had to deal with.



## Adjustment

Grief is not something you can 'get over' like a cold, or can 'snap out of'. Grief remains a part of us. In time it is possible to adjust to it, to make allowances for our feelings and to understand ourselves when we get angry over little things, or feel hurt or cheated. It is worth remembering that although no one can shelter you or take the pain away, people nearly always do manage to find ways to cope eventually. While it's hard to see your way out of the dark tunnel of grief, every tunnel has a way through to light at the other end.

### *Grief is not something you can 'get over'*

In time, you will find new strengths, new opportunities and new courage to lift some of the burden from you and to build a new life. If you can cherish good memories, as well as building new interests and people into your life, it regains a purpose. You may want to take time in making major decisions.

You cannot avoid memories: there will be reminders all around you, but the most poignant ones are buried deep within you and nothing can or should obliterate them. Remember with honesty, with tears or joy, both the good times and the bad times. Try not to worship an idealized image of your loved one.

### *Grief is an individual process*

It can help to take one day at a time. There can be an expectation from others that you will be fully recovered after six months, when in fact people may grieve for much longer and you, like everyone, can expect anniversaries, birthdays and special occasions to be difficult and times when you need more support.

Grief is a very individual process. Here we have included a selection of frequent statements from others who have been bereaved which you may find helpful.

### *I don't believe they're gone, I can still hear and see them...*

Even when you have known for some time that someone is going to die, there is still a sense of shock when the death occurs. You may feel cold, numb, empty and unreal for a time, and have trouble in believing that they are really dead and are not coming back. This sense will start to fade in a few days or weeks, although it may return from time to time. When it does, you might feel that you can hear or see them again, and each time there will be fresh shock and disbelief when you realize the truth of the loss. One extension of this belief is that you may dream of the one who has died.

### *I don't seem to be able to settle down to anything, yet there's so much needs doing...*

You will probably find it difficult to concentrate, feel that your thoughts are confused and that everything is an effort. You may lose your appetite, become forgetful and feel tired, yet have difficulty in sleeping.

Try to eat proper food rather than snacks, and try to get adequate rest even if you cannot sleep. Most people cry many times when they remember the person who has died, while this can leave you exhausted, it is a normal way of letting your grief out. Holding your emotions in can be just as exhausting.



### *I always seem to want to talk about it*

There is often a recurring need to talk about the dead person, their illness and death, the good times and the bad times. The best way in which family and friends can help is to listen and to share this remembering, although they may find this listening painful themselves or embarrassing because they do not know what to say.

### *Sometimes I can't remember...*

Life may seem flat and aimless, but you can allow memories to come and stay – whether they are good memories or bad. Just as our own faults can lead to regrets and feelings of guilt, we must remember that other people have faults. We preserve their memory more fully if we remember the whole person, faults as well as virtues. If you find your memories have gaps, try talking with someone who will help you to explore these spaces and fill them.

### *I don't think I will ever be happy again...*

Things may feel so bad that you cannot see any prospect of them ending. In some ways, they don't end, because your memories remain, but much of the pain does become less acute. At some stage, you will find that your sadness is interrupted by pleasure about something that happens now. These feelings of pleasure don't mean that you're not caring for the dead person. It may help to renew old interests and in time seek new ones.

But being alternately sad and happy can be very confusing and difficult to cope with, and special anniversaries, including birthdays and Christmas, can be particularly difficult.

### *No one seems to understand how I feel – they tell me I should be over it by now...*

People who tell us not to get upset mean well, but perhaps do not realise that distress, which may continue for months, is natural and right when someone close to us dies. Try to go to someone who will understand your need to grieve and be upset.

### *In some ways the pain of grief itself stayed much the same...but as time went on my world expanded so it felt less suffocating*

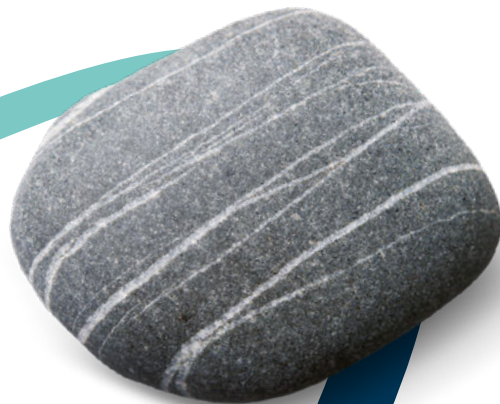
Remember, grief is a natural, normal and necessary emotional reaction following a bereavement. Knowing how grief works and recognising that how you are feeling is perfectly normal can be reassuring and help you to cope with your emotions. Knowing where and how to access bereavement support, should you need to, can also provide reassurance.

Most people find the support they receive from family and friends is enough to help them through their grief.

Some people find it helpful to meet with, and talk to other bereaved people as this can help to normalise the process of grief, through sharing experiences with each other and gaining support from people who are in a similar situation.

In the early days and weeks following a bereavement it is normal to feel overwhelmed by all the feelings and emotions that you are experiencing. There is no set time for grief – it will be different for everyone, but over time as you begin to adjust you will notice that whilst those emotions are still present they do become less overwhelming and you are able to cope better with these feelings.

For a minority of people grief may become more prolonged and difficult to work through. For lots of different reasons, some people may get “stuck” in their grief, unable to adjust to life without their loved one and unable to find pleasure again in life. When grief becomes complicated like this it can be helpful to talk to a professional who is specially trained in therapeutic bereavement support such as a counsellor.



# Pilgrims Stepping Stones

## Bereavement Support

We offer a variety of bereavement support services from our Canterbury, Ashford and Thanet hospices. Some groups are available to anyone living in east Kent who needs bereavement support, even if their loved one was not a patient of the hospice. See below for further details.

### **Bereavement Café**

Many bereaved people find it helpful to share their experiences of grief with other people in similar situations and this informal support group provides the opportunity to meet and talk with other bereaved people in a relaxed and welcoming safe space over a coffee and a biscuit.

Facilitated by Pilgrims trained Bereavement Support Volunteers, Stepping Stones Bereavement Café meets regularly at each of our hospice sites at Ashford, Canterbury and Margate.

**Who is it for?** Any adult living in east Kent who has experienced a bereavement – there is no requirement to have previously been supported by Pilgrims.

For more information please call 0123 350 4127 (Option 2) or email [steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org](mailto:steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org)



### **Bereavement Walk & Talk**

The benefits of being in nature, gentle exercise and social interaction are well known, and this informal bereavement support group provides the opportunity to combine all three. Our trained Volunteers will guide you along a gentle paced walking route, set in a beautiful tranquil location, promoting wellbeing and encouraging you to meet new people, share experiences and support each other in grief.

Meeting regularly at various public walking routes in the Canterbury, Ashford and Thanet areas – each walk lasts approximately 45 minutes and there is parking available at the meeting point with somewhere to buy refreshments along the route.

**Who is it for?** Any adult living in east Kent who has experienced a bereavement – there is no requirement to have previously been supported by Pilgrims.

For more information please call 0123 350 4127 (Option 2) or email [steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org](mailto:steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org)

### **Therapeutic Bereavement Counselling**

If you feel overwhelmed with prolonged or complicated emotions associated with grief, bereavement counselling may be helpful to some people. Pilgrims accredited and experienced team of counsellors and volunteer counsellors are specifically trained to offer one to one therapeutic bereavement support – either face to face, over the telephone or via video call.

**Who is it for?** Family/friends of hospice patients only.

To enquire about therapeutic bereavement counselling please call 0123 350 4127 (Option 2) or email [steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org](mailto:steppingstones@pilgrimshospices.org)

A member of our counselling team will contact you discuss if bereavement counselling is right for you.

If you are not a family member or friend of a hospice patient but think that therapeutic bereavement counselling might be helpful to you please contact your GP for advice.

*"It was invaluable to have a safe place to let thoughts and feelings out, knowing others are in the same position or at similar stages in their loss experience"*

*"Always feel much better after a meeting, I like the fact I can talk and unburden myself"*

*"I like the relaxed atmosphere. You can choose to participate as much or as little as you like"*

*"Such a lovely group – as much laughter as tears – so cathartic!"*

*"This group is fantastic as are the volunteers, it's a safe and warming place and couldn't feel more welcome"*



# Bereavement support for children and young people

Explore our website to find out more about how we could help you, or call our advice line

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## Children grieve too

As adults we want to protect the children in our family, which is a natural response to the circumstances. However, children, like adults, have feelings which they need to express, many of which will be similar to those described in this booklet, but there are differences depending on the age of the child.

### *In some ways grief doesn't end, because your memories remain*

No child is too young to notice that an important person is no longer around and it is important to tell all children, in simple language, that the person has died and is not coming back. If children do not understand what has happened they can become confused and anxious, so not telling the truth can be harmful.

Young children in particular find it difficult to grasp the concept of past and future, and only see the present as being real. They may repeat obvious questions or seem callous, but this is the result of their need to concentrate on the here and now. They may be distressed one minute and want to go and play the next as they continue to explore the world and enjoy it – this is quite natural.

In general children find it difficult to express their feelings in words, so their feelings often come out through changes in behaviour. However, like adults, every child will respond differently to bereavement depending on age, maturity, temperament, their closeness to the person who has died and how secure and supported they feel.

Don't hide your grief from the children in your family, seeing you grieve and hearing you talk about the person who has died may help them express their feelings and talk too. Spending extra time with children in the early part of bereavement will help them feel secure, as will keeping their routine as normal as possible and reassuring them that it is okay to have strong feelings. Talking to them over time, drawing pictures, creating memory boxes, writing stories, making albums about family events and the person who has died all helps the child keep their memories alive and work through their grief.

## Other useful contacts

### **CRUSE – Bereavement Care**

National Helpline 0808 808 1677  
[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)  
East Kent CRUSE 0750 765 6023  
[eastkentswale@cruse.org.uk](mailto:eastkentswale@cruse.org.uk)  
South Kent CRUSE 0844 800 9104  
[southkent@cruse.org.uk](mailto:southkent@cruse.org.uk)

### **National Bereavement Service**

Offers practical and emotional support and legal assistance  
0800 024 6121  
[www.thenbs.org](http://www.thenbs.org)

### **WAY (Widowed and Young)**

Support for people widowed under 50  
0300 201 0051  
[www.widowedandyoung.org.uk](http://www.widowedandyoung.org.uk)

### **Switchboard – Grief Encounters**

Support (including bereavement) for LGBTQ+ people  
0127 320 4050  
(Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 7-9.30pm)  
[switchboard.org.uk](http://switchboard.org.uk)

### **SoBS**

For adults who have been bereaved by suicide  
Helpline 0300 111 5065  
[www.uksobs.org](http://www.uksobs.org)

### **The Compassionate Friends**

For bereaved parents and families, offering support after the death of a child  
Helpline 0345 123 2304  
[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)

### **Winston's Wish**

Practical support and guidance to those supporting a bereaved child  
Helpline 0808 802 0021  
[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)

### **Holding On and Letting Go**

Bereavement support events for children throughout Kent  
Helpline 0344 561 1511  
[www.holdingonlettinggo.org.uk](http://www.holdingonlettinggo.org.uk)

### **Child Bereavement UK**

Helpline 0800 028 8840  
[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

### **Sands**

For anyone affected by the death of a baby  
Helpline 0808 164 3332  
[www.sands.org.uk](http://www.sands.org.uk)



Find out more about  
our work and other ways  
you can support us.

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**Visit:** [www.pilgrimshospices.org](http://www.pilgrimshospices.org)  [pilgrimshospices](https://www.facebook.com/pilgrimshospices)  [@PilgrimsHospice](https://twitter.com/PilgrimsHospice)

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