

What is Grief?

Grief is the normal process of reacting to a loss. For most people, their main experience of grief will be following the death of someone they care about. When this happens, we go through a process of mourning where we adapt. This period where we feel grief and we mourn is referred to as bereavement.

Although we mostly associate grief with death, it is important to remember that we can experience feelings of grief after other losses such as family breakdown, losing a job or going through life-changing events or illnesses. Many people will be experiencing grief related to the current pandemic, after having lost a friend or family member, or adapting to the loss of their ability to live life as they previously did.

Experiences of grief, bereavement and mourning vary greatly from person to person, and can be influenced by our faith, culture, the nature of the loss and the time we have spent anticipating it.

Covid-19 is affecting how we grieve as funeral and burial traditions are changed and restricted. Social distancing and self-isolation measures are resulting in fewer people being able to attend funerals, and many people are coping with grief and bereavement on their own. Some ways you can help yourself include:

- Stay in touch with friends and family with texts, phone or video calls
- Look after yourself by eating, sleeping and staying active - outdoors if you can, or in your home
- Ask for help if you need to, from family, friends or neighbours, or see below for local organisations that can offer mental health support and practical assistance.

Whatever the cause, grief can be experienced in many ways, and there is no right or wrong way to feel. The process of grieving is not fixed and feelings of grief can last for many months or years. Even when we feel we have grieved, events and memories can trigger these feelings again.

Grief can affect us emotionally, creating feelings of anger, sadness, guilt, anxiety, despair, shock and resentment. We may find our interactions with other people change and we withdraw from social contact, experience changes in our attitudes and relationships or find ourselves acting in ways not usual for us. We may find our mind works differently, leaving us unable to concentrate and relax, we may become more forgetful or over-worry about other people. Physical symptoms of grief include trouble sleeping, changes in appetite, illnesses, lack of energy and unexplained aches and pains.

Grief can be an uncomfortable feeling, but it is the process by which we come to terms with loss. If we do not allow ourselves to feel grief and express all the emotions that go along with it our mental health may be affected. We can end up feeling depression or anxiety, blaming ourselves, relying on unhealthy coping strategies such as self-medicating with food, drugs or alcohol. We may also find ourselves feeling intense and overwhelming grief when it's not appropriate or safe.

Cultures across the world have varied rituals and traditions around grieving after the death of a loved one, most of which help us say goodbye and come together to share feelings. Participating in these traditions might make feelings more intense, but expressing them can help with moving through the process of grieving.

If you are struggling to cope there are many organisations that can help.

At A Loss: online resources, including one specifically for men and young people, signposting to other bereavement services. Online chat to a counsellor, Monday to Friday, 9am-9pm www.ataloss.org/live-chat

Bristol MindLine: Confidential helpline for people in distress. Call 0808 808 0330 free, all week from 7pm - 11pm | <http://bristolmind.org.uk/help-and-counselling/mindline/>

Bereavement Advice Centre: practical information about what to do following a death, and resources around grief. Freephone helpline open Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm 0800 634 9494. www.bereavementadvice.org

Cruse Bereavement Care: Online resources, and a free helpline (Monday to Friday 9.30-5pm (excluding bank holidays), 8pm pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays). Call 0808 808 1677 or email helpline@cruse.org.uk. The Bristol office can be contacted on 0117 926 4045 or bristol@cruse.org.uk | www.cruse.org.uk

The Harbour: Counselling for people facing death, or who have been bereaved. Call 0117 925 9348 or use the contact form at www.the-harbour.org.uk

Hope Again: Online resources and case studies for young people, with advice for parents. Email hopeagain@cruse.org.uk and see www.hopeagain.org.uk
<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

There are organisations you can talk to about your feelings, whilst staying within your faith community. We have listed the key organisations you can get support from below, and you can find more in our faith booklets. Please go to the resources section of the CASS website - www.cassbristol.org/download-category/faith-toolkits/ to download a free copy. If you would like us to send you a paper version you can email info@cassbristol.org or call 0117 304 1400 to leave a message. Many private counsellors also offer faith perspectives in their sessions.

Christianity - Vine Counselling: counselling with a Christian ethos, based in North Somerset 01934 876377 | www.vinecounselling.org | vine.counselling@hotmail.co.uk.

Islam - Muslim Bereavement Support Service: advice and phone support for bereaved women from an Islamic perspective 020 3468 7333 | info@mbss.org.uk | www.mbss.org.uk

Judaism - Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service 0208 951 3881 | www.jbcs.org.uk | enquiries@jbcs.org.uk

Sikhism - The Sikh Helpline free helpline available 24/7 0845 644 0704 | www.sikhhelpline.com