

## Coping with Grief & Loss

### What are Grief & Loss?

Loss, and the need to grieve for who or what we lose, is something that almost every human being will experience at least once in their lifetime. Each of us is a unique individual and so our experience of loss and grief will be different to that of every other person, but sharing our thoughts and feelings with others can be a comforting and even a healing experience.

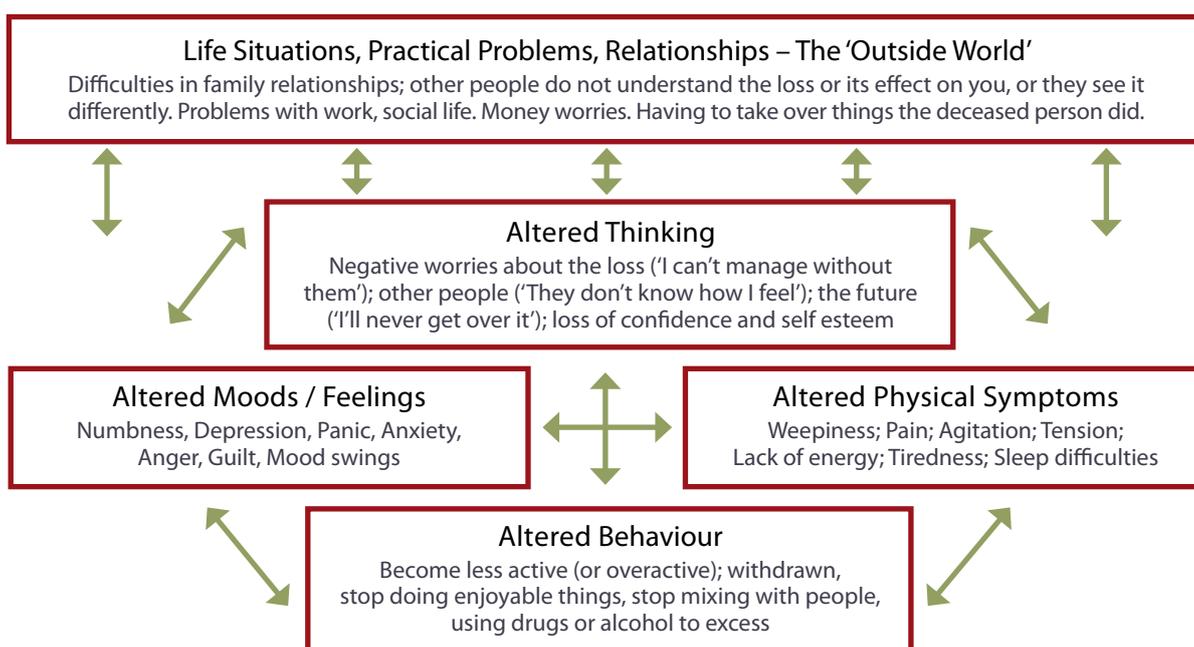
Loss can involve many things – the death of a family member, a close friend or even a loved pet. We can also experience a sense of loss when a relationship ends, particularly if it has been very close or lasted a long time. Serious illness in a loved one, such as dementia, can leave us feeling bereft. Loss can also be experienced when we lose material things such as a job, money or a place to live. We can also experience losses such as a sense of security, pleasure or achievement if the circumstances of our life change. Finally, loss in the present can be made worse if it brings back memories of losses that we have suffered in the past. Grieving is the process that allows us to come to terms with our losses.

Perhaps the most important thing to say about loss and grief is that they are **NOT** 'illnesses', but a result of normal events which occur in almost everybody's life, perhaps many times over.

Different people cope with loss and grief in different ways, so there is no one 'right' way of coping. However, if grieving becomes prolonged or our distress becomes very severe then help from other people may be needed.

This leaflet uses the 'Five Areas' model to help you understand some of the feelings, thoughts and behaviours which may be encountered during grieving. Your guide can give you other leaflets which explain the 'Five Areas' model in detail – there is a suggested list on the left of this leaflet.

Look at the diagram below and discuss with your guide which of these might apply to your experience of loss and grief. Your guide can give you a blank 'Five Areas' form to fill in for yourself if you wish.



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You may experience a number of these symptoms, but remember that this does NOT mean that you are 'ill' or 'going mad', though sometimes it may feel as if you are, particularly if you have odd experiences such as seeing the dead person, hearing their voice or feeling their presence – these experiences are not unusual after a death.

When do people begin to recover from a bereavement?

Coming to terms with a death is a very gradual process which can take a considerable time. People usually find that gradually they are able to get on with their lives and think a little less about the person they have lost, or spend more time remembering the happiness they enjoyed with their loved one rather than dwelling on the fact that the loved one has passed away. Most people begin to feel like this within one or two years of the death of someone close to them but it may well take longer. It may be difficult to accept the death of a loved one but it can still be possible to move on with life in spite of this loss.

Can tablets help?

Your doctor may offer you tranquillisers to help you through the early phase following the death. They can make you feel calmer and may help you in the short term but are not helpful for longer term use. Some people find that the numbing effect of tranquillisers does not allow them to experience grief during this time. Antidepressants can be helpful if the depression following bereavement becomes severe or prolonged. Some form of talking therapy or counselling may help a person who has become 'stuck' or is suffering a prolonged grief reaction and may not want tablets. Your doctor or guide may help you find a counsellor or you can contact CRUSE, a national organisation set up to help people

affected by bereavement that has many local branches – *your guide can give you a local contact list.*

What can a bereaved person do to help themselves?

Bereavement is always a difficult time but there are things you can do to help yourself through it.

- > Prepare as far as possible for the death of someone you are close to. It is important emotionally and practically to talk things over. If you are preparing for the death of your partner, discuss with them the jobs your partner used to do, sort out finances. Say all the things you would want to say.
- > Don't make major changes in your life, such as selling your house, moving areas, jobs, etc, until you have had time to adjust to the death. This is a time when people may make changes they can regret.
- > Do make sure you look after your own health. This is a time when you may become prone to illness. Eat well, rest properly, take extra care. You may want to take vitamin supplements if your appetite is very poor.
- > Talk to people about how you feel. Don't bottle things up. Go to your doctor if you feel you have no one you can talk to. He or she may suggest speaking to a counsellor.
- > Accept that this is a difficult time and that you may not be able to function as well as you normally would at home, at work or socially.

Finally, it is important not to feel guilty if you are beginning to build a life for yourself following a death. It is quite normal to begin to recover and start to rebuild your life, and is not in any way disloyal to the memory of the person who has died.