

Bereavement & Grief

What you may experience

Bereavement and trauma affect people in different ways. Everyone's experience and responses will be individual to them. There is no right or 'normal' response.

The following are some of the reactions and feelings that you may experience in the hours, days, weeks and months after a traumatic event. It is common to experience them immediately or some time later.

The feelings can be very strong and frightening. It can feel as if you are losing control or 'going mad'. These are normal reactions but if you find that they are continuing and affecting your ability to cope with daily life and your relationships with others, contact your GP or the Health, Work & Wellbeing Department.

What you may feel

Fear

You may feel frightened:

- of being alone
- of 'breaking down' or 'losing control'
- of a similar event happening again
- of going to particular places that recall the event
- for your own safety
- for the safety of those close to you

A sound or smell may remind you of the event and this can be very frightening.

You may experience panic attacks.

Guilt

You may feel guilty:

- for being better off than others who you think have suffered more
- for being alive, or not injured
- for not having done more to protect or save other people
- for things you have said and done or not said and done in relation to the dead person

Anger

You may feel angry

- about what has happened
- with whoever caused it or allowed it to happen
- about the injustice and senselessness of it
- about other people's lack of understanding
- about other people's perceived mistakes or failures

Numbness

You may feel numb. The event may seem unreal, like a dream. You may feel that it has not really happened, or that it is happening to someone else

Emptiness / hopelessness about the future

You may feel empty and hopeless about the future. You may feel that life is not worth living. You may even feel that you want to end your own life, or to harm yourself.

Thoughts

Memories

You may experience repeated and intrusive thoughts and memories of those who have died or been injured or the event itself. You may find yourself constantly recalling other bereavements and losses.

Inability to concentrate

The stress and your preoccupation with the experience may affect your ability to focus on the here-and-now. You may have poor concentration, which can make you more accident prone. You may feel jumpy, restless and anxious.

Reconstructing / questioning the event

You may find yourself going over the event, reconstructing it so that it comes out differently. You may be constantly asking yourself 'why?' - why me? Why them? Why did it happen?

Dreams and Flashbacks

You may experience recurring dreams and nightmares.

You may find yourself repeatedly re-experiencing the trauma through unwanted images or flashbacks.

Behaviours

You may find yourself crying more frequently than before, or crying in situations that wouldn't normally be seen as an occasion for tears.

You may find yourself doing things you haven't done before, such as:

- Drinking alcohol excessively or taking drugs—alcohol or drugs may dull the pain, but only temporarily
- Avoiding situations, objects or people who remind you of the event or the person who has died

What can you do?

It is important to try to take each day at a time and to do what you know is right for you. Everyone has their own way of grieving and coping with loss. These are some general suggestions about what can help.

Look after yourself

Don't expect too much of yourself. Give yourself time to grieve, to acknowledge what has happened and to heal. Try to be kind to yourself. Do things and be with people that you find helpful and avoid those you find unhelpful. Get enough sleep and try to eat well.

Accept support with everyday tasks if you think it will help—although some people find it a relief to have ordinary, daily tasks to distract them. Set yourself small, realistic goals. Try to keep to familiar routines that give a sense of order and control. This also applies to children: try to keep their usual day and bedtime routines.

Don't be afraid of sharing emotions. Don't be ashamed or embarrassed about crying.

Do things that help you relax - a massage, a walk in the park, listen to music. Try not to cut yourself off from friends, family, work colleagues and neighbours.

Talk about it

Many people find it helpful to talk about what has happened and how they feel, over and over again. This can be an important part of the healing process. Find someone you can talk to—a friend, someone who has had similar experiences, your GP, a counsellor or bereavement support organisation.

Accepting the reality

Attending the funeral (if able), returning to the scene of the incident and talking to people who were there or who know what happened can all help the reality of what has happened to sink in, which can aid the grieving and recovery process.

This leaflet has been compiled to support you, at this time. Please contact:

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