



## **Responding to Bereavement**

It's been expressed that having someone you know die can be one of the hardest things to experience in life. Plus that, if you're young, bereavement – that's the word used to describe what you experience after someone has died - can be even more difficult. Please do know however, that support and advice are available to help if, and when, it happens.

When someone you know dies, it can be incredibly hard. You may feel as though your world has crashed down around you. Alternatively, you may not feel very much emotion at all. It may be that you just don't know what to think or feel.

Depending on who it is who has died, and the circumstances of their death, it can make you feel very alone, especially as a young person, because you might anticipate that none of your friends have gone through anything similar and you might feel that they won't understand or that they won't know what to say.

When someone we know has died, there are no rules about what we should feel, and for how long. But many people who are bereaved, find they feel one, or a mixture, of the following:

- sadness
- shock, particularly if the death was unexpected
- relief, if the person's death followed a long period of illness or the person was in pain or suffering in some way.
- guilt and regret
- anger
- anxiety
- despair and helplessness
- depression

Various other insights are offered about how we might feel after someone we know has died...

...that our feelings, whatever they are, may be very intense, particularly in the early days and weeks after their death.

...that the passing of time can, and generally does, help those intense emotions to reduce.

...that there's no need to feel guilty about starting to feel better - it doesn't mean that we're not respecting the person's memory or that we are forgetting about them.

As has been mentioned already, people react differently to a bereavement. If one of your friends is grieving about someone who has died, you may not know what to say

to them. If this is true for you, you could simply try to let them know that you're there for them plus you too could get help and support given your role as a friend to them.

The advice is that there are various things that can help you when you are affected by someone's death. This relates particularly to:

## **1. Looking after yourself:**

When you are affected by someone's death, you may not feel like looking after yourself but it's important to do so to help you to cope with the extreme emotions that can come with bereavement.

- Eating – you may lose your appetite, but try to keep eating as normally as possible: your body needs food, even if you don't want it; ideally, go for healthy, well-balanced meals.
- Sleeping – it can be hard to sleep for various reasons, but there are some things that can help. Try to keep regular sleeping hours rather than sometimes going to bed early and sometimes late; Cut down on the amount of caffeine you drink, especially in the evening. (There are varying amounts of caffeine in tea, coffee, energy drinks and fizzy drinks (particularly colas). Caffeine interferes with the process of falling asleep and also prevents deep sleep; Try to get the temperature in your room just right; Be aware that using a phone or a tablet, or other sources of 'blue light', just before trying to get to sleep can stop you from doing so; Try something called 'writing away your worries' where you write down any worries that you might have so that they are listed, and hopefully won't keep your mind active, and you awake.
- Socialising – seeing your friends and keeping up a normal pattern to life may help to take your mind off things and allow you, if that's what you want, to talk about how you're doing. Don't feel guilty however about not thinking about the person who has died or about having a good time with friends.
- Exercising – regular exercise can make you feel good and help you to sleep. Avoid doing exercise close to bedtime though as it will increase your 'alertness' and your levels of hormones like epinephrine and adrenaline, likely stopping you from sleeping. It can also be a relief to focus on something physical when you're going through an emotional time.

## **2. Talking about your feelings:**

Talking about how you are feeling can be an important part of responding to a bereavement. Choosing who to talk to about your feelings is a very personal decision. If the person who has died is a family member, it could be good to talk to someone else in your family because they know the person and they're likely to understand something of how you're feeling. You may however prefer to talk to someone not connected to your family though so that there is a sense in which you can say what you want and not have to be thinking about that other family member's feelings.

A close friend can be a good listener and a source of comfort and support, even if they haven't gone through what you are.

Talking to your tutor, or to one of your teachers, can help them to understand what you are going through and might take a bit of pressure off you if you are feeling distracted or finding it hard to concentrate at school.

For times of bereavement, when someone you know has died, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler offer these words of comfort and encouragement:



*based on the NHS website's article 'Bereavement and Young People'*

