

Dealing with Bereavement



Wellbeing
at the Bar

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Grief is a normal part of life, but when it hits, it affects all individuals differently.

If grief is affecting you, there is something you can do about it. You do not need to wait it out. You can enjoy peace, love and happiness again much sooner than you think.

There are some common responses that most people experience, though not necessarily with the same intensity or in the same order.

Five Stages of Grief

Elisabeth Kubler- Ross's five stages of grief are helpful here.

1. Denial

When people are first told a friend or colleague has died, they find it difficult to take it in. You say to yourself "It can't be true" or "they've made a mistake". This is completely normal; your brain is just trying to protect you from the pain you know is inevitable. Many people keep talking to the deceased for a long time afterwards because it's comforting.

Be kind to yourself and others. Attend the funeral, and take part in it if you can. Write a letter of thanks and goodbye to the individual. Attend a memorial service. These are all gentle ways to move yourself and others through denial.

2. Bargaining

There may be a brief period where you or others may express a wish to trade place with the individual who has died, often expressed in "It should have been me". Another example may be people praying and asking God to bring the person back and take them. This usually doesn't last very long, but is an intense feeling. Share this with someone close and let them support you through this phase. If you are the support person, don't panic, but stay close.

3. Anger

Some may experience anger very quickly, while it may become apparent for others much later. Initially the anger is directed at others, perhaps those who broke the news, other members of chambers, or sometimes complete strangers. The feeling of anger may be directed at yourself. For example, feeling perhaps you should have done more. Often, anger may be directed at the deceased for leaving you. You know you are moving through it once you start to feel angry at the deceased. Do not be afraid to express it, perhaps by writing out how you feel or talking about it.

Allow those you are supporting to be angry and to direct it at you, without taking offence. It will pass.

4. Depression

This is a dark and lonely place for people who have come to terms with the feeling of loss. They often withdraw from social activity and isolate themselves. It is ok to withdraw and grieve alone for a short period, but you need to counterintuitively reach

out to others at this stage. Share your sadness with good friends and maintain your social connections. Now would be a good time to visit the grave and/or to perform a private ritual for your friend.

You can support people by helping them perform their ritual, if invited to do so, and to be prepared to sit with them when they are down.

5. Acceptance.

It often takes 6 months to a year to feel better. By this point you can laugh again, and you can talk about the deceased without crying. Allow this to happen without feeling guilty, which may kick in soon after feeling happy again. Enjoying life again and moving on is what your deceased friend or colleague would want for you, and is the best way to honour their memory.

You may also be familiar with another grief model '7 stages of grief'. This is like the Kubler-Ross stages of grief. In the seven stages of grief the initial stage is Shock or Disbelief. There is also the addition of Guilt as a stage.

Grief Recovery

The idea of stages of grief suggests that if one is in one of these stages there is nothing they can do but wait until they pass into the next stage. This is a damaging myth. There are [things you can do](#).

1. Identify the people in your life who care about you and would be willing to let you talk about your memories of your loved one.

2. Read a book like "The Grief Recovery Handbook: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, and Other Losses" by John W. James and Russell Friedman for suggested exercises to unburden your heart. Other books written by those who have experienced a loss like your own may be helpful. See other recommendations below.

3. Get a massage. Many people underestimate the emotional benefits that come from massage as tense muscles are often carrying the burden of unexpressed emotions. Find a trained massage therapist who will make you feel comfortable enough to cry if you need to.

4. Create a book of memories with pictures and journaling about precious times with your loved one. You may find it helpful to share the book with a trusted friend.

5. Write each day about the feelings you are experiencing. Give your heart an opportunity to feel your feelings rather than suppress them.

6. Use music to express your feelings. If you already know how to play an instrument experiment with making your own song that matches your mood. Even if you don't know how to play you can do this with a piano or other percussion instruments.

7. Use art to express your feelings. *It is not about the product, but the process.* Even if you don't know how to draw or paint, you can create images to match your mood using colour and intensity. The process of simply doing art is healing. If you can tell someone about your images or process it can be an even greater tool for healing.

8. Grief Recovery can help you take important steps toward healing your broken heart. Many of us find ourselves alone and isolated in our grief. At such a vulnerable time, it can be difficult to reach out and ask for the support we need from those around us. We don't want to be a burden on them. If it would be helpful to you to talk to someone about your loss, get in touch with some of the charities (website links) below.

Supporters & Colleagues

If you are the support person, allow your friend to move through the grief process in their own way. Talk about the deceased, use their name, and encourage the telling of stories about them and looking at photos. Keep reaching out even if the person is reluctant and may be giving you a hard time.

Advice for Chambers dealing with death in chambers

- Make sure all colleagues are told of a death as soon as possible
- Allow time for all who wish to attend the funeral
- Think of having your own memorial service
- Allow for these rituals to take place before moving desks and reassigning work.
- Consult with colleagues about how to do this.
- Monitor and continue to support those closest (Consider offering services such as EAP, LawCare and appropriate clinicians).

Resources:

- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, On Death and Dying 1969
- Harold Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People. Schoke Books, 1981
- Maria Sirois, A Short Course in Happiness After Loss: (and Other dark, Difficult Times) 2016
- Maria Sirois at TEDxBerkshires You Tube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohGMg-LJCjs>
- William Worden, 4 Tasks of Mourning <https://whatsyourgrief.com/wordens-four-tasks-of-mourning>

Support Organisations:

- Bereavement Support Organisations - MuchLoved www.muchloved.com/gateway/grief-support-organisations.htm
- Bereavement support organisations - Care for the Family <https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/.../bereavement-support/supporting-bereaved.../furt...>
- Mind, the mental health charity <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and.../bereavement/>
- Winston's Wish - the charity for bereaved children <https://www.winstonswish.org.uk/>
- Cruse Bereavement Care <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>
- Child Bereavement UK <https://childbereavementuk.org/>
- The Compassionate Friends <https://www.tcf.org.uk/>
- The Loss Foundation <https://www.thelossfoundation.org/>

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