

A Guide for Young People (11 - 25 years) following loss/ bereavement/ traumatic incident

Understanding your feelings and reactions

When someone close to you dies it is normal to feel very shocked and deeply distressed. Everyone is different but it is likely that you may experience some of the following:

- A sense of numbness or unreality
- Frequent crying or not shedding any tears at all
- Mood swings involving strong emotions
- Guilt that you did not prevent the death in some way
- Blame – either blaming yourself or others for not preventing the death
- Feeling out of control, or that you are going 'mad'
- Difficulty falling to sleep and nightmares, or very vivid dreams once asleep
- Loss of appetite or excessive comfort eating
- Thinking that you have seen or heard the person who has died
- Feelings of deep sadness

All these feelings and reactions are normal and will reduce over time. Ways in which you can help yourself include:

Not feeling afraid to ask questions - It usually helps to find out how the person died. If there is an opportunity to see the body or visit the place where the person died, this may help you absorb the reality of what has happened. If family members are unable to answer questions, Doctors or medical professionals involved, may be able to. Alternatively, an adult who will listen to your questions, might be able to find out the answers for you.

Funeral arrangements - Attending a funeral is a way of saying goodbye, together with the family and friends of the person who died. Prepare yourself for the funeral by finding out what is likely to happen.

If the person who died is a member of your family or a close friend, you may wish to be involved in planning the funeral by, e.g., choosing a piece of music or writing something. Some people write a letter to the person who died or a poem about them. You could also ask to read this out at the funeral or ask someone to read it out for you.

Remembering the person who died - It can be comforting to talk a lot about the person who has died; sharing memories with family and friends. Asking for a possession of theirs to have as a keepsake can also help. Some people make a collection of photos into a special album to remember the person who died. Others make up a collection of objects or songs to serve as a reminder.

Looking after yourself - This may seem unimportant but taking extra care and eating regularly may guard against accidents and illness. Do not expect too much of yourself as you are likely to be preoccupied with remembering the person who has died and processing the shock of their death.

Resuming day to day routines and activities - Returning to school/college or work may help you to feel a sense of normality. Try not to feel guilty about taking part in activities such as sports or even social events. It is okay to enjoy yourself again and even to laugh. It is very unlikely that the person who died would want you to be sad all the time.

Contact with other bereaved young people - You can sometimes feel isolated or different from other young people when someone close to you has died. Whilst no one can ever know exactly how you feel, there will be other young people who have been bereaved living in your community. A local hospice or charity organisations may be able to put you in touch with others by providing somewhere for you to meet together.

How others can help - Your friends will want to help but probably do not know how. Sometimes just being with you and saying nothing may help. People who have been bereaved often say they want to be treated normally, but need their friends to let them know that they have heard about the person's death and are sorry.

It is likely that your studies or work may be affected and if you are taking exams or being assessed in some way, it will be helpful for teaching staff or employers to know you have experienced a bereavement. If this is difficult for you, consider asking a friend or family member to speak with them on your behalf.

Talking to family and friends usually helps. However, if you are not able to do this, for whatever reason, there are other people who may be able to support you:

- Cruse Bereavement Care - [Cruse Bereavement Care | Wolverhampton Information Network](#)
- Compton Hospice Care Bereavement Support - [Bereavement Support | Compton Care](#)
- Guidance, resources and Counselling support offered by Winston's Wish Charity - [Winston's Wish - giving hope to grieving children \(winstonswish.org\)](#)
- Child Death Helpline – Freephone service for anyone affected by the death of a child - <http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk/>
- Child Bereavement UK - [Child Bereavement UK](#)
- 'Conversations About Bereavement' sessions offered by The Samaritans – [Let's Talk Bereavement - Conversations About Bereavement | Samaritans](#)
- Rethink Black Country – support for those who have been bereaved by suicide - <https://www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/services/community-support/black-country-support-after-suicide/>
- Support After Suicide Partnership (SASP) – Support for organisations and individuals who support people who have been bereaved or affected by suicide - <https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/>

If after several weeks or even months, you are feeling no better, or dwelling on the circumstances of the person's death you may need some professional help for yourself and your family. You may wish to consider making an appointment with your GP (General Practitioner) to discuss your feelings. They will be able to refer you to other support services, if required.

Alternatively if you are still at school or attending college, your teachers/tutors may be able to access support from the Educational Psychology Service.