
HELP & HOPE

FOR MEN LIVING WITH LOSS



INFORMATION AND ADVICE FOR **MEN** FOLLOWING A DEATH

- ◉ UNDERSTANDING FEELINGS
- ◉ LIVING WITH GRIEF
- ◉ LEARNING TO COPE
- ◉ RECOVERY
- ◉ SEEKING SUPPORT
- ◉ HELPING YOURSELF



WHAT MEN
SAID:

“

I thought I was the only person in the world that felt like this, and I felt so alone. Then I went to the group and listened to other people who had lost someone too, and I realised they felt like me, and they understood without me even having to talk. The more I talked about how it was for me, and listened to other people as well, the burden seemed to be a bit less. There's no quick fix, there's no tablet you can take to fix it. It never goes away completely; but it does ease a bit; and you can turn it to something better, rather than letting it eat away inside you, but you have to give it time. Being part of the bereavement support group gave me time.

”



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INTRODUCTION

Men and women sometimes cope with grief and loss in different ways. There are many reasons for this. Recent research tells us that men and women process information differently. This means they can differ in their priorities, perceptions, behaviours and ways of coping with and expressing their emotions.

The way our society defines what is 'masculine' and 'feminine' also plays a part in these differences. Some men may feel their role is to:

- Be 'strong' and support others
- Be self-contained and independent
- Take charge and solve problems

Men may think that how they cope with emotions and feelings is a test of their masculinity or a challenge to be overcome. They should be strong, capable and in control.

We hope this booklet will provide help and hope, information and advice to all men who have been bereaved.



THE EARLY STAGES OF GRIEF:

This booklet is for men who have been bereaved.

We have included the words and experiences of some bereaved men to try and help other men who are going through the grieving process. The booklet covers some of the impacts of grief, and also has information on ways you may be able to help yourself, and where you can get more advice and support.

The death of someone close can be shattering, and everyone experiences grief differently.

The men's stories included here illustrate that there is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve. How we react will be influenced by many different things, including our gender, age and personality, our cultural background and religious beliefs, our previous experiences of bereavement, our circumstances and how we cope with loss.

You may initially feel shocked, numb, guilty, angry, afraid and full of pain.

These feelings may change to feelings of longing, sadness, loneliness - even hopelessness and fear about the future. Such feelings are not unnatural, or wrong. They are all 'normal' reactions to what may be the most difficult experience of your life. Every person's experience of grief is unique. Some 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, there is help available: contact your GP or Cruse.



“ IT WAS LIKE CRAMPS IN YOUR STOMACH OR HEARTBURN OR INDIGESTION THAT YOU THOUGHT WAS NEVER GOING TO LEAVE IT. ”

WHAT MEN
SAID:



"The house was so quiet and I didn't sleep. I was numb, it felt as if this was not really happening. The reality hit me, I would never see her again. It was total disbelief and I kept thinking I would wake up from this horrible dream. But it was true, my life had changed forever. I told people that I was ok but I was really ripping apart inside. Why, if there is a God, did this happen. Nobody could help, I was desolate in my loss. So lonely, so lonely, just desolation and loneliness. I didn't want to think about tomorrow."

"It was the death of my son. I didn't know what to do. I was in so much pain, it shocked me so much at the time."

"ANYONE LOOKING AT ME WOULD PROBABLY THINK I WAS DOING WELL BUT IN REALITY I AM HANGING ON. MY PARTNER WAS MURDERED YEARS AGO IN A HOMOPHOBIC ATTACK. A FEW YEARS LATER I FOUND MY NEIGHBOUR HANGING IN HIS GARDEN. THIS NEW GRIEF IS MINGLING WITH THE OLD GRIEF CREATING A VACUUM OF PAIN."



THE EARLY STAGES OF GRIEF:

Everyone has their own way of grieving, and their own ways of showing and coping with their feelings, but sometimes this can be hard for others to understand. Even close family members who are sharing the same loss will respond differently to a bereavement. A death can bring people together, but it can also create huge tensions and strains within families. Conflicts can emerge.

Physical reactions to a death are very common. You may lose your appetite, have difficulty sleeping, or feel exhausted all the time. People are also often very vulnerable to physical illnesses after a bereavement. If you are not sleeping well, you may feel mentally drained and unable to think straight. These are normal reactions to distress and loss, and should pass in time. But you may want to consult your GP if the problems persist.

Mood swings can be very frightening but they are normal. You may feel as if you are on an emotional roller coaster. You may feel overwhelmed and find it difficult to do even everyday tasks. It can be hard to concentrate. Some people find it helpful to throw themselves into work; others find they need to take some time out of day-to-day life and activities. Everyone needs to find their own way of coping.

It may take you some time to grasp what has happened. Don't worry. It is quite normal to see the person, to hear their voice, or find yourself talking to them, especially if they were an important presence in your life. It can often happen when you least expect it, as if your mind has temporarily 'forgotten' that they have died.

Going over every detail of the past, particularly around the time of the death is a common reaction, particularly where the death was sudden and unexpected, or occurred in traumatic circumstances. It is the mind's way of dealing with what has happened. You may feel immense emotional pain — some people can find this overwhelming and frightening.

A lot of people have feelings of guilt — for being alive, when the person is dead; for not having somehow prevented their death; for having let them down in some way. You may find yourself constantly thinking: 'If only...' You may be constantly asking yourself 'why?' Why them? Why did this happen to us? Death can seem cruel and unfair. It can make people feel powerless and helpless. These emotions can be very painful to live with, but feeling guilty will not help. It is important to try to focus on the good times, and not to dwell on things in the past that you cannot change.



You might wonder how you are going to survive this immense emptiness, pain and grief. You have lost someone who gave meaning to your life, so grieving for the loss of them is natural and necessary. Life is not the same, it cannot be: and this hurts. No one else had the relationship you had with the person who has died, so the right way to grieve for them is your way. This is all a normal part of grieving. You may experience some or all of these...

Feelings/Emotions

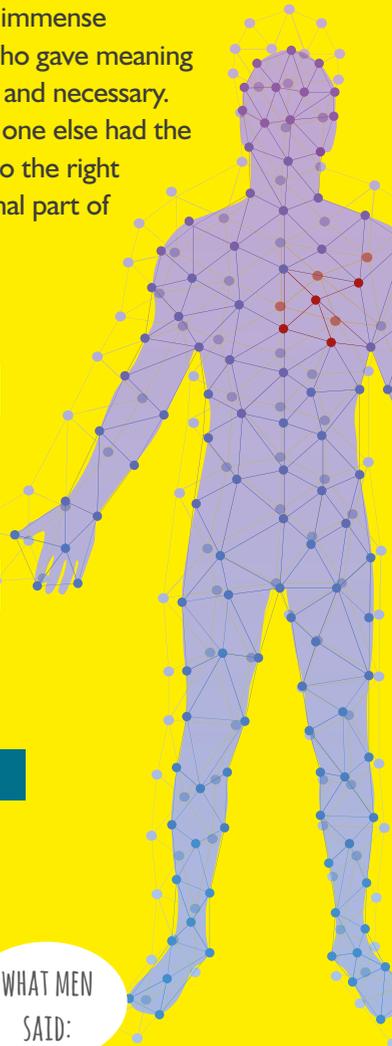
Shock, numbness, sadness, guilt, panic, anger, helplessness, anxiety, fear, pain, anguish, relief, loneliness, fatigue, yearning

Behaviours

Restlessness, crying, withdrawal, sleep disturbance, loss of appetite, deep sighing, excessive busyness, hitting out, dreaming of the person, lack of concentration

Physical Changes

chest pains, breathlessness, headaches, minor infections, dry mouth, hair loss, weak muscles, tensions, stomach problems, skin rashes



“THE FIRST YEAR IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE DEATH WAS VERY, VERY ROUGH. IT’S LIKE A TOOTHACHE AND IT MAYBE GOES AWAY FOR A FEW MINUTES AND YOU THINK THAT’S GREAT I’LL MAYBE NOT NEED TO GO TO THE DENTIST...AND THEN BANG IT GOES AGAIN. YOU WOULD THINK SOMEBODY WAS HITTING YOU WITH A SLEDGEHAMMER.”

WHAT MEN SAID:



“My family were torn apart by the tragedy. No one spoke of my sister. It was as if she never existed. This was just our way of dealing with our grief.”

LIVING WITH GRIEF:

Sometimes it is just when you think you should be feeling better that you feel as if you are falling apart.

In the early days following a bereavement, family and friends often rally around and it is only later, when everyone has gone home and you are left with your grief, that the reality of the death hits you. The physical and emotional loneliness can be very hard to bear. There is no time limit on grief. If you feel that you are struggling with your emotions or that you are not coping with life, then it may be time to seek help and support.

Often it can be the unseen impacts which are most difficult to cope with.

It may be that you use negative coping strategies, for example misusing alcohol, medication or drugs to help block out the pain, or just get through the days and nights. Long term this is going to be more harmful to you. It is important to recognise this and try to change your behaviour. Seek support and help to do this if you cannot do it alone.

IMPACTS WE SEE

DISBELIEF

SADNESS

CRYING

ANGER

WHAT WE DON'T SEE

EMOTIONAL FALLOUT

SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

PHYSICAL IMPACTS

INTENSE LONG TERM LONELINESS

NEGATIVE COPING STRATEGIES TO
BLOCK OUT PAIN

FINANCIAL CONCERNS

UNWANTED OR DISTURBING IMAGES

THOUGHTS OF HARM

DREAMING ABOUT THE PERSON WHO DIED

FEARS FOR FUTURE

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

ISOLATING YOURSELF

WHAT MEN
SAID:



“What I fear the most? That the loneliness will last forever and I will never share my life with somebody again. All of life’s experiences, both good and bad, are better when shared with somebody. I fear that I will never be happy again. That I am condemned to a life of perpetual regret and sorrow. I spend much of my time reflecting on all that I have lost. I have to move on but I am afraid of things that I do not fully understand.”

“The second year is worse than the first because the shock of what has happened has worn off, the adrenalin has stopped. Reality has set in and with it the knowledge that death is forever.”

“IT IS LIKE BREATHING SHARDS OF GLASS AND I AM CRYING. I DO MY CRYING IN PRIVATE AT HOME ALONE OR IN THE CAR BEFORE GOING INTO WORK OR WHILE I AM OUT WALKING. I AM TIGHT LIPPED AND DO NOT TALK OPENLY ABOUT HOW I FEEL. HELP IS ALL AROUND BUT I DO NOT SEEK IT. IN MY WORK I HELP OTHERS AND I REFUSE TO THINK ABOUT MY OWN NEEDS.”

“I WAS FEELING VERY LOW, VERY LOW. I THINK IT WAS ONE OF MY DARKEST MOMENTS. I HIT THE DRINK. I KNOW IT DIDN’T HELP BUT AT THE TIME I JUST WANTED TO DRINK AND SMOKE. BUT AT THE TIME I FELT SUICIDAL. MORE SO THAT I WANTED TO TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL AND JUST GET OUT OF HERE. I WAS ON THE VERGE, THE VERGE OF TAKING MY OWN LIFE. THERE WAS NO TWO THOUGHTS ABOUT IT.”



LIVING WITH GRIEF:

You may find yourself facing family, financial and domestic responsibilities with which you don't feel able to cope.

You may feel very angry that suddenly you have to deal with all these things. You may feel angry with someone you feel is responsible in some way for the death. Anger is a completely normal part of grief. It is a perfectly healthy and natural response to feeling out of control, powerless and abandoned.

Hopelessness and despair are understandable reactions when someone who has been a central part of your life dies. It is not unusual for people facing bereavement to think about their own death, and even think about taking their own life as a way of escaping the pain. It is important to talk to people you trust about these thoughts, and to remember that life does go on, and while there will always be someone missing in your life, there are many things that are worth living for. It may be helpful to talk through these feelings of hopelessness and despair with someone experienced in bereavement support such as Cruse.

People can find it hard to concentrate following a death, which may create difficulties at work. Explain this to your manager. You may be able to come to some temporary arrangement about shorter working hours, or other ways of helping you through this difficult time.

Friends and acquaintances may seem to be avoiding you, particularly once the funeral is over. This is often because they don't know how to behave or what to say. You may want to talk about the person who has died, and find that people keep trying to change the subject, or suggest that it is 'bad for you' to talk about them so much. Talking about the person who has died is an important part of the grieving process, and hopefully there are people in your life who will listen and understand, and be able to share your memories.

You may be particularly affected on and near significant anniversaries for many years after a death. Some people find it helpful to plan in advance what they are going to do on those days, to avoid feeling left alone with their emotions. Some people create a tradition of visiting special places that remind them of the person who has died. Others find this too painful. There is no right and wrong way to mark these anniversaries. You need to find the way that is right for you.



WHAT MEN
SAID:



“Sometimes you don't really want to go to your family and cause them any more pain than what they've already went through because your feeling low. I was frightened and reluctant. But I found a way forward. I knew this was going to hurt me having to talk about it. But it was fantastic. At the beginning I was holding back. It was almost like driving the car without releasing the clutch. I knew I was in the right place. They let me talk. I talked an awful lot. I welcomed the fact that she let me speak about what I wanted, which I needed to do.”

“I'M A CATHOLIC MAN, AND BEING ABLE TO PRAY AND TALK ABOUT THAT, WAS IMPORTANT TO ME. EVERY DAY I LEFT AFTER GETTING SUPPORT I FELT THAT BIT LIGHTER, KNOWING IT WAS CONFIDENTIAL AND THEY REALLY DID CARE. KNOWING I HAD THEIR SUPPORT. I WAS VERY EMOTIONAL AND I WOULD FEEL DOWN, BUT THEY DIDN'T RUSH ME. THEY GAVE ME THAT TIME. IT WASN'T ABOUT SYMPATHY, IT WAS MORE ABOUT EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING. I FELT RELIEVED AND I COULDN'T WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT SESSION.”

“
WORK COLLEAGUES HAVE SAID THEY
NOTICED THE DIFFERENCE IN ME.

I CAN CONCENTRATE AT WORK MORE NOW WHEREAS BEFORE I GOT LOST IN MY THOUGHTS. I'VE STOPPED SMOKING AND DRINKING TOO MUCH, WHEREAS BEFORE I WOULD HAVE WENT TO THE BOTTLE. NOW I'M GOING FOR A WALK OR TALKING TO SOMEONE ABOUT THINGS.”



It is important that you take care of yourself following a bereavement.

One of the most helpful things is to talk about the person who has died and your relationship with them. Who you talk to will depend on you. It may be your family, friends, a faith/spiritual adviser, your GP or Cruse.

Do ✓

- ✓ Talk to other people about the person who has died, about your memories and your feelings.
- ✓ Eat properly and try to get enough rest (even if you can't sleep).
- ✓ Give yourself time and permission to grieve.
- ✓ Understand grieving is a process. There will be set backs.
- ✓ Develop a network of people you can call or be with .
- ✓ Try and get some form of physical activity, such as walking, gardening, sport, etc. This can help lift your mood, and may help you sleep better.
- ✓ Seek help and support if you feel you need it. Tell people what you need .
- ✓ Develop a routine of things to do and people to see or speak to. This will help give your days structure.

Don't ✗

- ✗ Isolate yourself.
- ✗ Keep your emotions bottled up.
- ✗ Think you are weak for needing help.
- ✗ Feel guilty if you are struggling to cope.
- ✗ Turn to drugs or alcohol - the relief will only be temporary.

Life will never be the same again after a bereavement, but the grief and pain should lessen and there will come a time when you are able to adapt and adjust and cope with life without the person who has died.



If you do not talk to someone, your grief may be all you are able to focus on.

Talking to others, whether this be friends, family, someone from work; or seeking support from Cruse may help you see a bigger picture.

WHAT MEN SAID:



INDIRECTLY AFTER THE SUPPORT HAD FINISHED IT EMPOWERED ME; EMPOWERED ME TO MAYBE ACCEPT MY LOSS AND GO BACK AND UNLOCK SOME MEMORIES THAT MAKE ME SMILE. KNOWING IN MY HEAD I ACHIEVED SOMETHING. I UNDERSTAND NOW WHAT BEREAVEMENT IS. WHAT I RECEIVED WAS RESPECT AND A LISTENING SERVICE, THAT IS UNIQUE

"Grief is not something we as human beings 'get over'. Instead, it is something we 'live with'... When we are bereaved, we need to be compassionate with ourselves as we seek out those who are willing to 'walk with' us in our grief."

"Understanding Grief"
Alan D. Wolfelt

HELPING YOURSELF THROUGH GRIEF:

Many people worry that they will forget the person who has died – how they looked, their voice. Remember the good times you had together. It is important to focus on your good memories. There are so many ways you can keep the memory of your loved one alive. These are just a few suggestions:

- Talk about them and your special memories
- Write down your memories
- Keep an album of photos
- Keep a collection of some of their special possessions
- Do something that commemorates them, such as planting a tree, paying for a park bench, or making a donation to a charity
- Make a scrapbook of their life



WHAT MEN SAID:



STARTING OUT IT WAS DAUNTING, BECAUSE I WAS GOING INTO A WORLD I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT. BUT IT WAS VERY RELAXING AND AFTER A WHILE YOU FEEL A GOOD BUZZ, A GOOD VIBE. IT'S A MIRACLE. IF YOU HAD KNOWN ME BEFORE I WENT FOR SUPPORT YOU WOULD SEE THE CHANGE. IT HAS BEEN VERY SPECIAL TO ME. I'LL HOLD IT IN MY HEART FOR EVER AND EVER. I'M EVEN THINKING ABOUT DOING A COUNSELLING COURSE IN THE FUTURE, THAT'S HOW MUCH IT'S TOUCHED ME.

HOW CRUSE CAN HELP YOU:

Cruse is a national charity which provides support, advice and information to young people and adults when someone dies. **Our services are provided at no cost.**

Cruse offer a range of services, including:

- one to one counselling
- support in a group with other bereaved people
- phone support
- email support: helpline@cruse.org.uk

To access services contact your local Cruse office

Armagh & Dungannon: **028 8778 4004**

Belfast: **028 9043 4600 / 028 9023 2695**

Foyle: **028 7126 2941**

Northern Area: **028 2766 6686**

North Down & Ards: **028 9127 2444**

Newry & Mourne: **028 3025 2322**

Omagh & Fermanagh: **028 8224 4414**

This booklet can be downloaded in pdf format from our website

www.cruse.org.uk/northern-ireland

For information on further services available in Northern Ireland:

access our website at www.cruse.org.uk/northern-ireland

Phone: **028 9079 2419**

Email: northern.ireland@cruse.org.uk

Freephone National Helpline: **0808 808 1677**

COMING FOR SUPPORT WAS LIKE AN OUT POURING OF GRIEF. I WAS ABLE TO SPEAK ABOUT IT, IT GAVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT MY SON AND ONLY TALK ABOUT HIM. EVERY DAY AFTER SUPPORT, I FELT THAT BIT LIGHTER, KNOWING IT WAS CONFIDENTIAL AND THEY REALLY DID CARE, KNOWING I HAD THEIR SUPPORT, BUT DON'T GET ME WRONG THERE WAS TIMES I FELT LIKE CRAP, I WAS VERY EMOTIONAL AND I WOULD FEEL DOWN, YOU KNOW THEY DIDN'T RUSH ME THEY GAVE ME THAT TIME. I FELT RELIEVED AND I COULDN'T WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT SESSION.



WHAT MEN
SAID:



Without the support I could have been dead, that's the short and long of it. I can see more now, if that makes sense. It's as though a cloud has been lifted from in front of my eyes. I can see where I'm going and what I want to do. I know now when I have my bad days grief doesn't have to be all I have. Getting help and talking changed my whole outlook for the better; for work, for family life, for everything. The way I think when I feel down has changed. The support has helped me change the way I think about grief. It has completely changed me for the better.

