

Coping with bereavement

The death of a loved one can be devastating. Bereavement counsellor Sarah Smith describes some of the feelings that can arise from losing someone, and where you can go for help and support.

Bereavement affects people in different ways. There's no right or wrong way to feel.

"You might feel a lot of emotions at once, or feel you're having a good day, then you wake up and feel worse again," says Sarah, who works at Trinity Hospice in London.

She says powerful feelings can come unexpectedly. "It's like waves on a beach. You can be standing in water up to your knees and feel you can cope, then suddenly a big wave comes and knocks you off your feet."

Stages of bereavement or grief

Experts generally accept there are four stages of bereavement:

- accepting that your loss is real
- experiencing the pain of grief
- adjusting to life without the person who has died
- putting less emotional energy into grieving and putting it into something new – in other words, moving on

You'll probably go through all these stages, but you won't necessarily move smoothly from one to the next. Your grief might feel chaotic and out of control, but these feelings will eventually become less intense.

Feelings of grief

Give yourself time – these feelings will pass. You might feel:

- shock and numbness – this is usually the first reaction to the death, and people often speak of being in a daze
- overwhelming sadness, with lots of crying
- tiredness or exhaustion
- anger – for example, towards the person who died, their illness, or God

- guilt – for example, guilt about feeling angry, about something you said or didn't say, or about not being able to stop your loved one dying

"These feelings are all perfectly normal," says Sarah. "The negative feelings don't make you a bad person. Lots of people feel guilty about their anger, but it's OK to be angry and to question why."

She adds some people become forgetful and less able to concentrate. You might lose things, such as your keys. This is because your mind is distracted by bereavement and grief, says Sarah. You're not losing your sanity.

Taken from the NHS web site Moodzone

www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/