

Coping with Bereavement

Losing someone you care about can be one of life's most difficult experiences. There are no easy answers when trying to help a bereaved family come to terms with their loss. Every situation is unique and people react in different ways and heal at different speeds. There is no defined time limit to grief.

Friends or relatives are usually among the first people to turn to after bereavement but there are many organisations that can help you. Your GP and the Citizens Advice Bureau can give you advice and lists of who to call, while the Samaritans and CRUSE are trained to listen and can help people cope with bereavement.

For many people the church is still a great source of help and support, and even if you are not a regular churchgoer, your Parish Vicar or Priest will be there to help and support you. These days there are also many web based bereavement support sites such as www.griefjourney.com.

We are able to lend books to clients and we have a selection which may help. Most dealing with general bereavement, but some specialised for example, how to explain a death to a child, and books for bereaved parents.

Children and Bereavement

Talking to children about death can be uncomfortable and very often parents don't think about talking to their children about this subject until a close relative, friend or even pet dies. This may be because parents do not want to speak about the subject themselves, or because they are attempting to spare their children the pain and grief that accompanies a loss. Unfortunately, waiting until the exact moment of grief means that parents are not in the best frame of mind to discuss death, and children only have confusion and frustration to compound their natural emotions regarding their loss. Instead, speaking with children about death as a natural part of life long before they are ever faced with it may spare everyone a further ordeal when a loved one does die.

Age Appropriate Information

As with most things, discussions about life and death should always be age appropriate for the child involved. This means using vocabulary that the child understands, examples to which the child can relate, and resources that the child will find interesting. For example, children who like to help in the garden may respond well to a discussion of plants or flowers that live and die. Children who enjoy animals may understand better if the example is based on a goldfish that stopped swimming. Books and certain children's television shows may well tackle the subject of death and provide an opportunity for parents and children to discuss the topic. Very often these discussions will be short as children have a naturally limited attention span. This is fine. The important thing is that a short discussion takes place, and further discussions continue when the next opportunity presents itself

Children and Funerals

When a death does occur, many parents are uncertain of if they should bring their child to the funeral. Parents should remember that funerals are events at which many individuals find closure and have a chance to say goodbye to the deceased. If the child is at an age where they may take advantage of these opportunities then they should be included. However, parents should be ready for questions at the funeral and/or burial. For example, when watching a coffin lowered a child may ask if it is cold in

the ground, or if it is really necessary to leave the deceased alone. Parents should answer these questions honestly.

General bereavement

Cruse Bereavement Care Tel: 0844 477 9400 Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk

Bereavement Advice Centre Tel: 0800 634 9494

Society of Bereavement Practitioners www.bereavementpractitioners.org

Sudden and neonatal deaths

Sands Bereavement Care Tel: 020 7436 5881 www.uk-sands.org

Bereaved parents

Compassionate Friends Tel: 0845 123 2304 www.tcf.org.uk

Sudden Adult Death

SADS UK Tel: 01277 811215 www.sadsuk.org.uk

Deaths by Suicide

SOBS UK Tel: 0844 561 6855 www.sobsuk.org.uk

Death after Road Accident

SCARD Tel: 084 123 55 42 www.scard.org.uk

Bereaved Children

Winston's Wish Tel: 01242 515157 info@winstonswish.org.uk

Holding On Letting Go Tel: 08445 61 15 11 info@holdingonlettinggo.org.uk

Holding on Letting Go is a Kent based charity devoted to supporting bereaved children.