



BIRMINGHAM
ST MARY'S
HOSPICE

Your life after loss

Coping with grief

The staff at Birmingham St Mary's Hospice would like to express their sympathy to you in your bereavement. The first few weeks of bereavement can be a particularly difficult time and this booklet has been designed to inform you of the range of emotions that people experience when someone dies and the ways that people are affected by grief.

We hope to help you understand more about your feelings and give you some thoughts on how to cope and who can help at this difficult time.

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Part one: What is grief?

Grief is a very personal experience and different for each of us.

When someone important in our life dies, our life can be thrown into turmoil and it can affect every level of our being.

“I don’t have the energy or feel motivated to do things anymore: nothing seems important now”

After the loss of a loved one you may feel overwhelming numbness and intense shock, or you may find yourself angry or helpless or consumed by sadness.

“I feel like I am going mad, my emotions are all over the place”

Grief can also be a very frightening experience, as you could find yourself confused and forgetful. While this feeling of losing control can be extremely disconcerting, you can find reassurance in knowing that over time it will pass.

“I often hear them talking to me and feel their presence”

Another by-product of grief is searching. When we lose something, we naturally try to search for it. For example, you may find yourself looking for a lost loved one in a crowd or listen for them when the telephone rings. You may even see them in the street or your house. These vivid experiences are frightening but completely normal and not a sign of madness.

“Why did this have to happen, it’s wrong and unfair”

Anger is a common reaction to loss. You may find yourself blaming God, family, friends, the hospital and medical staff, or even the person who has died. This anger can also be turned inwards, leading to feelings of guilt because of things you did or didn’t do.

“They were so ill I felt relieved when they died, now I feel so guilty to have felt that way”

Guilt is also a common emotion if you feel relieved that a relative who was suffering from a distressing or painful illness has passed on. The best way to deal with these frightening feelings is to talk about them with a person you trust.

“My heart keeps racing and I feel unwell”

In addition to emotional changes, at times of grief your physical health may also be affected. You may experience restlessness and be compelled to keep busy but not always in a productive way. You may be more sensitive to noise or want to avoid busy places.

“I go off to sleep but wake up very quickly”

You may feel tired and your sleep pattern maybe disrupted. You may also lose your appetite or even suffer new and unexplained pains, with a stomach ache, tight chest, or dry throat or mouth.

“I can’t do anything and everything just feels like too much trouble”

It is very common to have aching muscles and feel physical exhaustion, or to feel numb, or anxious and vulnerable. These symptoms of bereavement will eventually subside, but if you have concerns about your physical health it is always wise to consult your GP.

“Where was God? Why did this have to happen?”

When someone dies it can challenge our beliefs. It can also be the way we make sense and find meaning in the pain and suffering experienced with loss.

Part two: How to help yourself

Be gentle with yourself

It's vital that you don't expect too much from yourself. Give yourself permission to be disorganised for a while. Forgive yourself when you make mistakes.

Care for yourself physically

Lack of sleep and nourishment may mean that you're more prone to infections and illness, so eating little and often and getting rest if at all possible are both important.

Take exercise

If possible do some form of exercise, even if it's only a gentle walk.

Be kind to yourself

Try to do one thing extra for yourself each week, such as buying your self a bunch of flowers or going to the cinema.

Deal with your feelings

Write down all the feelings that are in your head, especially before going to bed, as this may help you to sleep better. Sharing the pain with other members of the family can be helpful, but they too may have their own pain and may not want to hear your story repeatedly. A good friend who's not so emotionally involved may be prepared to listen. If this is difficult then there are Birmingham St Mary's bereavement workers and support groups that can help.

Take things slowly

Making big changes such as moving house, starting a new relationship or changing your job should be delayed for at least six months. You've suffered a huge loss, and need to adjust to that change in your in your life first.

Don't rush to dispose of clothing

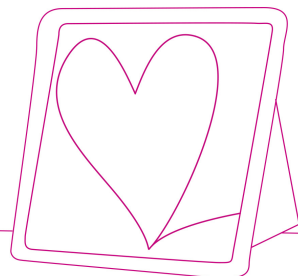
Rushing to get rid of your loved one's clothes and possessions, even if you're persuaded by friends to do this, isn't necessarily useful. It's best to do it when you feel ready. You may want to keep an old jersey which still reminds you of your loved one's special smell. This is normal. It's worth remembering that others may also value a keepsake.

Work on your self-esteem

Your self-esteem may have taken a real knock. To help morale, buy a notebook to record your daily 'successes'. Write at least one success each day. Acknowledge yourself each time you achieve something, however small.

Recall happy memories

Remembering the good times with the person who died can be painful but healing. Looking at photographs, making a memory book and keeping meaningful mementos may help.



“There are sad days, but it’s easier to remember the good times and other special events that we shared. I don’t like to dwell on sad, unhappy events - these I must put away. I’ll always remember them, but on the more positive side rather than the negative side.”

Look for the positive

People often find a positive outcome to grief. It might sound unthinkable if you’re currently in the depths of bereavement but many people find that, after a time, they start to see ways in which their experience has actually enriched their lives, giving them a new perspective or confidence.

Part three: How to find help

“I didn’t think talking to someone like this would help and I have been really surprised by how much it has helped me to sort out my feelings”

At Birmingham St Mary’s Hospice we know that many people cope with their grief with the support of family and friends. There are, however, many people who have to face their grief alone. Even if you have family and friends it can sometimes be difficult to share how you are feeling because they may also be grieving and you don’t want to upset them.

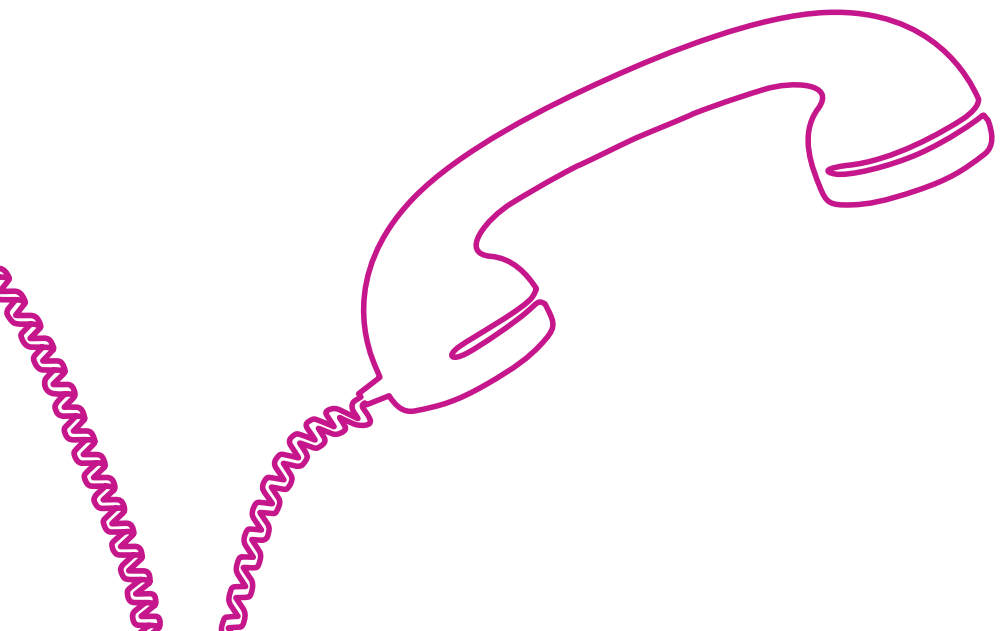
Our Bereavement Support service

We provide a safe and confidential space for you to talk about all your feelings with one of our trained bereavement workers or counsellors. This support will last for as long as you need and will be designed to help you face your future with strength and confidence. There are also support groups run from the Hospice for people who would like to talk things over with other bereaved people or just meet up for some relaxed social events.

Sometimes, after bereavement, people find it hard to cope at home or they may worry about managing their affairs. It can be difficult for some people to get out of the house and keep in contact with friends or take up new activities.

If you feel you need assistance with problems like these, our trained Volunteer Support Workers (based at the Hospice) may be able to help.

You can access bereavement support at any time by contacting the Bereavement Team at the Hospice. They can also advise you of other counselling and support services that may be available, so you can choose what feels most suitable for you.



Helpful organisations and websites

Birmingham Asian Resource Centre

Birmingham wide organisation with a detailed understanding of the needs of the local Asian community. Provides resources and practical help.

110 Hamstead Road, Handsworth, B20 2QS

Tel: 0121 523 0580

www.asianresource.org.uk

Bereavement Advice Centre

A national organisation which offers advice on what to do after a death e.g. registering the death, finding Funeral Directors and handling the probate and other legal matters.

Tel: 0800 634 9494 (9.00am-5.00pm Monday to Friday)

www.bereavementadvice.org

Bereavement Trust

A national freephone helpline, operating every evening of the year.

Tel: 0800 435 455 (6.00pm-10.00pm)

info@bereavement-trust.org.uk

www.bereavement-trust.org.uk

Samaritans

You can talk to Samaritans at any time of the day or night. Samaritans volunteers listen in confidence to anyone in any type of emotional distress, without judging or telling people what to do.

13 Bow Street, Birmingham B1 1DW

Tel: 116 123 (free to call)

Tel: 03300 945 717 local call charges apply

Support Line

Provides confidential emotional support to children, young adults and adults.

www.supportline.org.uk

Switchboard LGBT + Helpline

Provides an information, support and referral service for lesbians, gay men and bisexual and trans people.

Tel: 0300 330 0630 (10.00am-10.00pm)

chris@switchboard.lgbt

www.switchboard.lgbt

Terence Higgins Trust

Provides support and information concerning HIV and Aids issues.

Tel: 0808 802 1221

www.tht.org.uk

Way Widowed and Young

Provides a self-help social network for young widowed men and women.

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

Way Up

Active self-help group providing mutual support to those widowed in their 50s and 60s.

www.way-up.org.uk

Other useful organisations

Age UK

Offers advice, information and services for older people and their carers.

National Helpline: 0800 678 1174

www.ageuk.org.uk

Citizens' Advice Bureau

Provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities.

Birmingham and Sandwell Advice Line

**Central Birmingham CAB Ground Floor Gazette Buildings,
168 Corporation Street, Birmingham B4 6TF**

Information Helpline: 03444 771 010 (9.30am-4.30pm

Monday to Friday)

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Sandwell Smethwick

370-372 High street Smethwick B66 3PJ

Tel: 03444 111 444 (charged at local rate)

www.citizensadvicesandwell.org.uk

Deceased Preference Service

To help stop unwanted post addressed to a deceased person.

Tel: 0800 068 4433

www.deceasedpreferenceservice.co.uk

Government

A Government website which provides a wide range of public services information, guidance about registering a death, dealing with someone's estate and belongings, pensions and benefits and printable materials including 'What to do after someone dies' which covers these matters.

www.gov.uk/after-a-death

Money Advice Service

Provides free and impartial money advice to help people manage their finances better.

Tel: 0800 138 7777 (free to call, Monday to Friday
8.00am-8.00pm / Saturday 9.00am-1.00pm)

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Part four: Children and young people

If you have children who have experienced a loss you may be unsure how to help them or who to ask for help.

Children experience many of the same feelings as adults when it comes to the loss of someone they love. However, they may hide these feelings, or display their grief in a different way from adults.

Children may ask practical questions instead of talking about their feelings. It can be reassuring to children if you listen carefully and discuss these questions as honestly as possible with them. Try to be clear and direct in the way that you speak to them (using phrases such as 'passed away' rather than 'died' can leave them confused). You cannot stop children feeling sad but you can support them by listening and talking.

There is a separate leaflet about childhood bereavement available from staff, or if you are concerned or want some advice you can contact Birmingham St Mary's Hospice on 0121 472 1191 and ask to speak to a member of our Family and Carer Support Team .

Organisations and website for children and families

Childline

A private and confidential service for children and young people up to age 19. Support is available by phone, email or 1-2-1 online chat.

Tel: 0800 1111 (free to call)

www.childline.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends

Supporting bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents after a child of any age dies.

14 New King Street, Deptford SE8 3HS

Helpline: 0345 123 2304 (10.00am-4.00pm / 7.00pm-10.00pm)

helpline@tcf.org.uk

www.tcf.org.uk

Edwards Trust

Provides a wide range of support to families following the loss of a child and to children, following the loss of a parent/carer.

Tel: 0121 454 1705

www.edwardstrust.org.uk

Hope Again

Provides support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone close to them dies.

Tel: 0808 808 1677 (Monday to Friday 9.30am-5.00pm)
hopeagain@cruse.org.uk
www.hopeagain.org.uk

Winston's Wish

Provides practical support and guidance for parents and carers of bereaved children, young people and their families.

Tel: 08088 020 021
www.winstonswish.org.uk

Other useful leaflets

Understanding Childhood Helping parents and children cope when someone close to them dies. Information can be downloaded from **www.understandingchildhood.net**



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At Birmingham St Mary's, we provide care to people living with life-limiting illness across Birmingham and Sandwell, as well as support families, loved ones and carers too.

We do this by taking care beyond the Hospice itself, offering personalised support in people's homes and in the community. Our aim is to help people to live well with illness, by supporting them to be comfortable, pain-free and independent.

All of our services are free of charge to everyone who uses them, including individuals, their families, loved ones and carers. It will cost £8.5 million to run all of our services this year. We receive some funding from the NHS (about 40%) but most of our funding needs to be raised through generous voluntary donations.

Birmingham St Mary's Hospice

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