



shawmind



BEREAVEMENT, GRIEF & MENTAL HEALTH





Bereavement & Grief – Overview

Loss is a normal part of life and the experience of losing someone to whom an individual has a strong bond is known as bereavement. Grief is both the response from and the process of an individual towards a loss, which is typically emotional, but can also have physical and psychological effects on an individual.

Grief typically occurs in response to the death of a loved one; of which there are several types. The most common form is regular **'uncomplicated grief'**; whereby individuals learn to cope with their loved one's death over time; typically, within one year of the loss. For some individuals however, following the loss of a loved one, they have a severe prolonged course of grief; this is referred to as **'complicated grief'** or **'persistent complex bereavement disorder'** in the DSM-5 (Nakajima, 2018).

Some individuals may experience grief prior to a death, because of a normal mental reaction in response to a diagnosis of a terminal illness, such as cancer - this is known as **'anticipatory grief'**.

Estrangement

Grief can also occur because of estrangement, which is the separation or loss of a previously existing relationship between individuals (typically occurring between family members). Estrangement often involves limited or no contact between individuals for large periods of time. It is therefore possible to suffer from grief without experiencing the death of a loved one, through a lack of, or negligible contact with family members. Estrangement from loved ones can induce symptoms much like those which occur after bereavement (see below for a list of these symptoms).

Impact of Bereavement & Grief on Mental Health

When someone is suffering from grief, their mental state can be impacted in a variety of ways, and they may not appear to be the same person as they used to be. This is a completely normal reaction to the loss of a loved one, however everyone reacts differently in these circumstances, therefore everyone will experience different levels of distress following grief. Naturally, losing a loved one will be a very difficult time and as such, grief will create an onset of natural emotions towards the loss of a loved one.

Symptoms of grief

If you have experienced bereavement, you will most likely experience these common symptoms following (uncomplicated) grief:

- Sadness
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Low mood
- Guilt
- Shock and emotional numbness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Disruption of sleep (insomnia or hypersomnia)
- Decrease or increase in appetite

Prolonged Grief Disorder (Complicated Grief)

Most people are able to recover from grief within a year of their loss

Grief is a natural response to the loss of a loved one; this is known as 'uncomplicated' grief. Most people are able to recover from grief within a year of their loss (Mughal et al., 2022). For some individuals, the loss of a loved one places an excessive emotional burden on their mental state and they are unable to process the loss, for which they then go on to develop complicated grief.

- In addition to experiencing the death of a loved one, the onset of persistent complex bereavement disorder/complicated grief occurs when one or more of the following symptoms are experienced on more days than not, to a clinically significant level.

Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder/Complicated Grief - Symptoms

- Persistent yearning or longing for a lost loved one.
- Intense sorrow or emotional pain.
- Preoccupation with the deceased/lost loved one.
- Preoccupation with the circumstances of the death or loss.
- This disorder is distinct from normal/uncomplicated grief by the presence of severe grief reactions which persist at least 12 months (or 6 months in children) after the death of the bereaved (APA, 2013).



Managing Complicated Grief

Grief is a normal reaction to loss, however if you are experiencing any of these persistent symptoms, please speak to a mental health professional, such as a therapist or counsellor.

The onset of complicated grief symptoms can also lead to other mental health problems, such as a low mood, stress, self-harm, suicidality and depression.



How Common is Bereavement?

Although most people will experience bereavement at some point in their lives, complicated bereavement disorder is less common.

- Uncomplicated bereavement is common in adults aged 60 and older (Shear et al., 2014).
- Approximately 2 in 100 to 4 in 100 people (2.4%-4.8%) experience persistent complex bereavement disorder (APA, 2013).
- Every year in the UK, more than 20,000 children and young people under the age of 18 experience the death of a parent, with 6% of school children grieving the death of a close friend (Child Bereavement UK, NHS Inform, 2020).
- Persistent complex bereavement disorder is more common in females than males (APA, 2013).
- Approximately 7% of bereaved older adults will develop complicated grief/persistent complex bereavement disorder (Shear et al., 2014).
- 54% of employees stated that they were aware of their employer having policies or support in place for employees experiencing bereavement (CIPD, 2021).
- Inversely, almost half of employees may be unaware of support or policies in place to help with employees experiencing bereavement (CIPD, 2021).

Bereavement Support Services

Bereavement & the Workplace

Employers are required to support staff who are dealing with mental health problems, such as those experiencing bereavement and grief. Employees are also entitled to time off from work during a period of bereavement, such as when a family member (parent, child, sibling or another dependent) dies. There is no specific amount of time which can be taken off from work for bereavement leave, although the time must be reasonable (ACAS, 2021). If an employee's child has died, they are typically allowed 2 weeks off from work, or if a stillborn has passed then an employee is entitled to parental bereavement leave.

- For more information on bereavement leave and employee rights, visit: <https://www.acas.org.uk/time-off-for-bereavement>
- Our mental health training course for managers can help you to support employees who are experiencing bereavement and grief.

Bereavement Support Payment

If you have suffered from bereavement, you may be entitled to support payments from the government. You must check your eligibility, as this is subject to certain conditions, such as the loss of a husband or wife within the last 21 months and you must claim payments within 3 months of a partner's death to receive the full amount.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/bereavement-support-payment>



If an employee's child has died, you are typically allowed 2 weeks off from work

Coping with Grief

Understandably, suffering from grief is a very difficult time for those who have to go through this experience. Fortunately, there are numerous different mental health support services for bereavement and grief.

The NHS recommends the following tips for coping with grief:

- Allow yourself time to process what has happened
- Talk to people about the person who has died
- Allow time for yourself
- Do what feels right for you – there's no right or wrong way to grieve
- Take care of yourself – eat well, exercise and avoid drinking too much alcohol

The death of a loved one will place a large mental burden on anyone and it is important to know when to ask for support. It can be beneficial to talk to someone that you trust, such as a friend or family member. If after a while you are still having difficulty coping with the loss, then it may be beneficial to speak with your doctor.



Coping with Grief – Children and Young People

Typically, children under the age of 3 do not understand the concept of death. Upon reaching the age of 4, children will experience (temporary) separation in settings such as going to nursery or being with a child minder. Children typically gain an understanding of the permanence of death by around age 7 and it is common for children to ask questions about this subject. At this age, children will also be able to explore their feelings of sadness and be able to comprehend that death can happen to other people as well as the person for whom they are grieving (NHS Inform, 2020).

When somebody dies, children can often detect that something is wrong and they will require support in understanding what has happened and being able to express their feelings. The following tips are useful when talking to children about death:

- Be honest with them; by letting them know that the person has died in words which they can understand.
- Tell a child that death is natural and that death is a part of the cycle of life.
- Allow children to express their feelings and reassure them that the death is not their fault.
- Realise that much like adults, children's emotions during grief can fluctuate. In the case of children, they may be tearful one moment, but then start playing the next and this is normal.

For more practical advice and urgent help on coping with bereavement and grief, please visit the Sue Ryder online community website:

<https://bit.ly/3IZsPGN>

Bereavement Depression Support

Alongside suffering from the loss of a loved one, another common mental health experience among many individuals is the onset of numerous emotional symptoms, such as low mood, guilt and sadness. If not supported properly, an individual can go on to develop depression; of which a common cause for this is grief. It is helpful to meet with people who have had similar experiences, which is known as peer support (NHS, 2021). Peer support groups allow people with depression to provide and receive help, which enables individuals to better cope with depression.

You can access the rethink website to find depression peer support groups:

<https://www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/support-groups/>

Alternatively, you can use the Mind website to find out more information about accessing peer support groups in your local area: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/peer-support-directory/find-peer-support-where-you-live/>

Bereavement Counselling

You can also speak with a qualified mental health professional, such as a counsellor, who can support you in learning to cope with the loss of a loved one. It is especially important to seek support if you have experienced or are currently suffering from any of the symptoms discussed in this guide.

You can also use these websites to obtain further support for bereavement and grief.

Useful Contacts and Websites

At a Loss

www.ataloss.org

BEAD – Bereaved through alcohol and drugs

www.beadproject.org.uk

Child Bereavement

www.childbereavementuk.org

Cruse

www.cruse.org.uk / Helpline: 0808 808 1677

Find bereavement counselling in your area:

Counselling Directory

<https://bit.ly/3Gqg4TM>

Hospice UK – Dying matters

www.hospiceuk.org/our-campaigns/dying-matters

Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity – Sands

www.sands.org.uk

Sudden

<https://sudden.org/about-sudden-death/>

Sue Ryder – Coping with Bereavement

<https://bit.ly/3Hpc733>

The Compassionate Friends

www.tcf.org.uk

The Good Grief Trust

www.thegoodgrieftrust.org

Widowed and Young

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

References (APA, 6th edition.)

- ACAS (2021). Time off for bereavement. Retrieved from <https://www.acas.org.uk/time-off-for-bereavement>
- American Psychiatric Association (2013). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.), pp. 789-792. Arlington, VA.
- Child Bereavement UK (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>
- CIPD (2021). A guide to compassionate bereavement support. Retrieved from <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/bereavement-support#gref>
- Gilligan, M., Sutor, J. J., & Pillemer, K. (2015). Estrangement Between Mothers and Adult Children: The Role of Norms and Values. *Journal of marriage and the family*, 77(4), 908-920. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12207>
- GOV UK (n.d.). Bereavement Support Payment. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/bereavement-support-payment>
- Mughal S, Azhar Y, Siddiqui WJ. Grief Reaction. [Updated 2022 Jan 6]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2022 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507832/>
- Nakajima S. (2018). Complicated grief: recent developments in diagnostic criteria and treatment. *Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological sciences*, 373(1754), 20170273. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2017.0273>
- NHS (2019). Grief after bereavement or loss. Retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/grief-bereavement-loss/>
- NHS (2021). Support groups - Clinical Depression. Retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/clinical-depression/support-groups/>
- NHS Inform (2020). Coping with grief. Retrieved from <https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/death-and-bereavement/coping-with-grief>
- NHS Inform (2020). Coping with Grief - Children and Young People. Retrieved from <https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/death-and-bereavement/coping-with-grief#children-and-young-people>
- O'Connor M. F. (2019). Grief: A Brief History of Research on How Body, Mind, and Brain Adapt. *Psychosomatic medicine*, 81(8), 731-738. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0000000000000717>
- Shear, M. K., Ghesquiere, A., & Glickman, K. (2013). Bereavement and complicated grief. *Current psychiatry reports*, 15(11), 406. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-013-0406-z>
- Zisook, S., & Shear, K. (2009). Grief and bereavement: what psychiatrists need to know. *World psychiatry : official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)*, 8(2), 67-74. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2051-5545.2009.tb00217.x>

If you would like more tips about living with
mental illness then please visit our website:
www.shawmind.org



Reg. Address: Unit 1, Waterside Court, 3 bold Street, Sheffield, S9 2LR, UK

contact@shawmind.org

www.shawmind.org

Follow the conversation:



Registered charity in England (no. 1167947), and a registered charitable company (no. 09921207) in the UK

3.0 JUN 2024