

The background of the page is a photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is filled with soft, horizontal bands of orange, yellow, and light blue, suggesting a calm but slightly overcast day. The water in the foreground is dark green and blue, with gentle ripples and reflections of the sky. A semi-transparent purple rectangular box is positioned in the middle of the page, containing white text. The title 'Understanding Bereavement' is written in a large, bold, purple font, centered above the text box.

# Understanding Bereavement

This Understanding Bereavement Leaflet can be used to understand the different stages of grief that happen following a bereavement.

## What Is Grief?

After a bereavement (the loss of a loved one), the range of emotions a person goes through is called 'grief'. The different stages and processes a bereaved person experiences are often referred to as 'the grief cycle' or 'the stages of grief'.

## What Feelings and Emotions Are 'Normal' after a Bereavement?

When someone is experiencing a bereavement, they will go through a variety of emotions and feelings which are all part of their grieving process. These emotions, feelings and behaviours will vary between individuals, based on their own experiences of grief, their relationship with the person they have lost and their individual personality. The following may be experienced after a loss:

- feeling sad, experiencing low moods or feeling a depressed numbness;
- feeling in denial over the bereavement;
- problems with sleeping (either difficulties falling asleep or difficulties staying asleep through the night);
- feeling a sense of shock over the loss;
- experiencing a loss of appetite and a sick empty feeling in the stomach;
- feeling run down and lacking energy or strength;
- a desire to be isolated and spend time away from others;
- feeling panicked or confused over life and future plans;
- a sense of relief, especially if the person who has died has been ill for a long time or has been suffering badly.



These feelings and emotions can vary from person to person and an individual might experience a range of them at different times.

## Pet Bereavement

The Blue Cross

<https://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-bereavement-and-pet-loss>

0800 096 6606

## Bereaved Families

The Compassionate Friends

[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)

0345 123 2304

## Support for making end of life plans

Dying Matters

[www.dyingmatters.org](http://www.dyingmatters.org)

0800 021 4466

## Mental Health Support

Mind

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

0300 123 3393

## Child Bereavement

Child Bereavement UK

[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

0800 028 8840

## Bereavement Support

Cruse Bereavement Care

[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

0808 808 1677

## Emotional Support

Samaritans

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

116 123



## How Can People Who Are Grieving Be Supported?

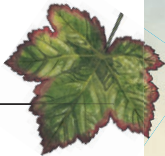
It can feel hard to know how to support someone who is going through a challenging time and grieving the loss of a loved one. Other people, as part of the individual's support network, are extremely important. It is not about saying the right things or having a solution. Knowing that people are there and care for them can make a huge difference to someone experiencing a bereavement. The following suggestions aim to help a person support someone else with their grieving.

1. Talk about making some form of contact with them and ask how they would prefer you to do this. This might be set times each week or on an 'as and when' basis. Talk to your friend about which they would prefer and use reminders to ensure you stick to this.
2. Be comfortable talking about the person who has died and recognise that your friend might want to, even when it makes them sad.
3. Respect their choices. If your friend does not want to see anyone or come out at all then it is important that you respect this. Make sure they know how to contact you and ensure you are available to them if they do reach out.
4. Your friend doesn't need solutions, distractions or answers from you. They need you to listen and be there to hear about how they are feeling and the hurt of the loss. They may want to talk about entirely different topics and this needs to be respected as well.
5. Recognise when your experience is helpful and when it is actually just you sharing a story. You may have suggestions or feelings to share which would massively help your bereaved friend and show the empathy you have for what they are going through. Do not feel the need to share stories though if it isn't beneficial for the person grieving.
6. If you feel concerned about your friend's welfare, it may help to talk this through with them and suggest contacting an organisation for additional support and guidance (see the list of suggestions on the back of this leaflet).

## What Are the Stages of Grief?

- Grieving is a very individual process but there are common 'stages' which occur at various times following a bereavement. These stages are:
- Denial. This is where a person feels a sense of shock or confusion about how the experience can actually be happening.
- Anger. This stage is when a person can start to feel anger over why the experience is happening and they can start to blame themselves and/or others for what has happened.
- Depression. This stage involves having difficulty with finding a sense of purpose and also feeling tired, numb, helpless, 'useless'.
- Bargaining. This stage is associated with feeling guilty over what could have been done to avoid the loss of a loved one and the subsequent feelings.
- Acceptance. This stage is not associated with feeling that things are right but is about acknowledging the loss and the impact it has had on life and the ability to see life moving forwards under new circumstances.

The stages do not necessarily happen in this order and someone who has shown signs of 'acceptance' might revert to 'anger' or another previous stage.



## Why Does Understanding the Grief Process Help?

Having an understanding of the grief process, and stages within it, is helpful as it can help the person grieving (and their support network) recognise the impact it may or may not have on their feelings and behaviour. This understanding and recognition can empower individuals to manage and support their grief cycles so that they are emotionally equipped and supported for each part of the process.

## How Long Is the Mourning Process?

The process of grieving a loss has no set time frame. The impact of the loss will vary between individuals and the grieving process doesn't follow a set trend or pattern. The person may go through stages that can be recognised but there is no set time in which to do this and many feel their life will never return to 'normal'. Gradually, there will be an adjustment to 'normal' activities and feelings but the loss may well be felt at unexpected times or very regularly.



## How Can a Person Support Themselves through the Grief Cycle?

Handling a bereavement is not an easy experience and the stages and feelings experienced vary hugely from person to person. They do not follow a set pattern. There are, however, some things that can be done to support the grief process:

- Become aware of the grief cycle and its stages and feel comfortable with each stage as it is experienced.
- Spend time with other people. This might be strangers who have experienced a similar loss to you or your close family and friends. Whoever makes a person feel supported and provides a social connection is beneficial.
- Seek specialist help and support to talk through the thoughts and feelings being experienced.
- Take care of your overall wellbeing; taking time to rest, sleep, eat and be out in the natural environment is all beneficial.
- Take life slowly and accept that some days will be particularly challenging.
- Create a way to explore the memories you have of the person you have lost (e.g. a photo album or a memory box).
- Recognise when a specific stage of the grief cycle is being experienced and notice things that help in that stage.

