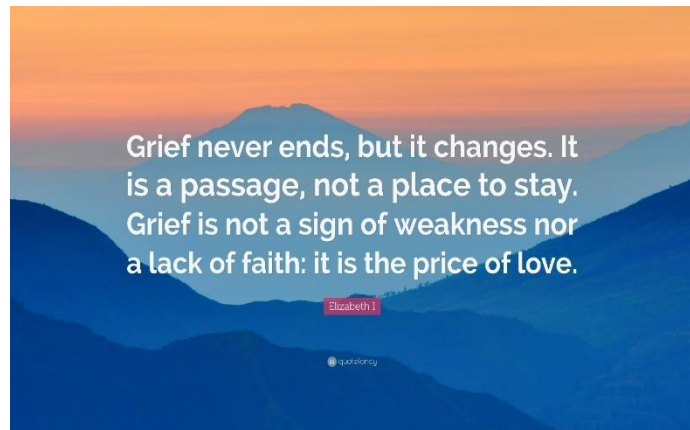


Bereavement and Loss

Bereavement is the word we often use when someone has died and we are experiencing grief. You may have heard people say that someone has 'suffered a bereavement' when, for example, one of their parents has died.

Big losses of other types can impact us in very similar ways to bereavement. Examples might be a best friend moving to another country, having to leave your home or your parents divorcing.



When someone dies or we have a big loss, some of us will behave in what we think of as a 'normal' way. We cry, we feel very sad, maybe we don't sleep very well. If we don't do that, we may think there is something wrong with us but that's not the case. Here are some very important points to remember:

- There are no right or wrong reactions to loss: the way you grieve will be unique to you.
- You may experience emotional swings and notice that you have good and bad days. You may feel better for a while and then worse - and that's ok, its natural. When you feel better, you haven't forgotten the person or thing you have lost, you are just beginning the process of adapting to life without them.
- There is a well-known theory of grief that focuses on us passing through different stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, though not necessarily in that order. This may seem true to your experience - or it may not! You may experience some of those stages or none at all.
- Another theory is that of the spiral model. This suggests that we don't ever accept someone's death or a major loss but that we learn to adjust. The spiral starts from the black hole of grief after the loss. During that time, we may experience a wide range of feelings such as sadness, denial and anger and then eventually come up the spiral to a place of adjustment. On birthdays and anniversaries, we may go back down the spiral, and then come back up again once that time has passed. Everyone's spiral will be different.
- You may experience a range of feelings such as shock, disbelief, numbness, confusion, guilt, anger, sadness, loneliness, overwhelm, depression and relief.
- It may seem odd to see relief in the list but it's important to remember that, even if we are close to people, our relationships are going to have been a mixture of good and bad – and some relationships are very bad indeed. The relief may be because it was so hard to watch someone we loved suffering – or it may be because the person we loved treated us badly.



If, in some ways, we are glad that someone has gone, that is not something to feel guilty about – it's just the way it is.

- The loss may affect your behaviour. You may experience sleep problems, irritability, tearfulness, loss of appetite, restlessness, anxiety and panic, nightmares or flashbacks, loss of interest, nausea and dizziness or struggle to concentrate on school work or even your favourite games and programmes. This is to be expected. The shock of a death or a huge loss can be as bad as being in a car crash. Your brain has been thoroughly shaken up. It's likely to take considerable time to recover. If you can't concentrate on your work, it's important for school to know – it's nothing to be ashamed of and teachers need to be sensitive to your difficulties.

Important note: Whilst there is a huge range of 'normal' behaviour when we are grieving, if you find that you are becoming very angry or violent in your grief, or suffering extreme sleep loss, serious eating problems, panic attacks or flashbacks or if you are thinking that it would be better if you were dead too, it is important to talk to an adult you trust as soon as possible.

- Sometimes we blame ourselves for a death or a family break up. Children especially are vulnerable to something called 'magical thinking'. They can't work out why or how this can have happened and think it must be something to do with them or what they did. Of course, this is not true. If you're thinking something like this, it would be wise to talk to someone you can trust about it.
- You may find birthdays, special events and anniversaries of your loved one's death or the time of the loss difficult or upsetting. Or you may not! Both are completely normal. Some people find that even though they are not consciously aware of a birthday or anniversary, they feel low or out of sorts or are sleeping badly at that time. It's only when they wonder why they are feeling so bad 'for no reason', that they notice what the date is. Our minds and bodies are intimately connected and sometimes our bodies 'remember' without our minds being aware.
- Losing a much loved pet can be just as bad or worse than losing a person – so all the information here is just as relevant to you if it's a pet that has died or gone missing. Our pets usually give us completely 'unconditional love': that means that, generally, they will love us no matter what we do. Unless we have behaved in a way which really frightens them, they don't hold our behaviour against us and are always pleased to see us! Losing such a reliable friend can be heart-breaking.
- There is no time limit on how long it takes to grieve for a loved one or another big loss. Your sense of loss may never go entirely but, in time, the grief and the pain can lessen, and you can learn to adjust. If, however, you are still feeling as bad as ever after about 6 months, it would be wise to talk to a trusted adult about your feelings. You might not want to leave it that long, if you feel really terrible! If you have lost someone really significant to you like a parent, sibling or best friend, or there has been something particularly difficult about the death, then the grief can go on much longer and it would be wise to seek some support from a counsellor, the Chaplain or a support organisation. There are some useful links following.

Here's a short video, an interview with Alex who lost his dad when he was 16:

https://youtu.be/AJIn1_1yFPA

It was filmed by 'Grief Encounter' which is a great organisation and has a really useful website.

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

Here are a couple more videos that you might find helpful. The first is about the process of grieving and the second offers some comforting thoughts about death.

<https://youtu.be/gsYL4PC0hyk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgEZYKKZqRA>

Ways of Coping

Here are some suggestions for how you might cope if you are finding things very difficult:

- Talk to someone you can trust – a friend, a school counsellor, the school chaplain or someone from your faith community, a teacher - about your feelings. A family member would also be suitable but sometimes that is difficult if you have lost someone from the family and they are grieving too.
- Try not to bottle up or push away your painful feelings. Allow some quiet/reflective time each day for your feelings to surface.
- Keep to a usual routine as much as possible and keep up with your usual activities and interests – but keep calm if you don't enjoy them as much as usual. That's normal. It will get better.
- Get some exercise. This will help you to release energy and emotions and also boost your 'happy hormones'.
- Some people find it helpful to express their feelings through writing a letter to the person they have lost or through writing in a journal.
poetry, singing, dancing, drawing, modelling or painting.
- Look after yourself. Eat well, get plenty of rest and shower/bathe regularly. If you are finding that you can't be bothered or you are really struggling to sleep, it's important that you tell a trusted adult.
- It's OK to have fun and enjoy life so do things that you enjoy and make you happy. Most people that we love would hate us to be miserable because they've gone!
- Many people like to do something to remember the loved one that has died. For some people, a grave to visit with flowers is very important. Others like to plant a tree or bulbs or a favourite shrub in their memory or raise money for charity. Here are some other ideas:
 - Create a memory box or jar, full of mementos of the person
 - Make a teddy or blanket out of their clothing
 - On birthdays, special events or anniversaries, you can remember them by lighting a candle, listening to their favourite song or tying a message to a helium balloon and letting it go. (Be careful with this one. Helium balloons can be dangerous to wildlife when they land.)
 - Have a memorial event each year. This might be a walk or a meal or it might be doing something that the person did eg. A cycle ride or a special visit to somewhere they loved.
- Read stories, poems and memoirs on loss and bereavement, or access information through websites. (See the bottom of this page for websites and a book list)
- Here are some lists of ideas that might help from the Child Bereavement Network, a great charity with a helpful website:

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/media/103287/grief-support-for-self.pdf>

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/media/103286/grief-support-from-parent-or-carer.pdf>

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/media/103289/grief-support-from-friend.pdf>

Remember – you might not want to do any of these things – and that’s fine! We are unique individuals who grieve in different ways.

Asking for help

As we’ve seen, grief is a natural process and there are many ways we can help ourselves through it. Sometimes, however, we may need further support. It’s important to remember that it is OK to reach out and ask for help.

There are a few ways you may wish to do this:

- If you would like the opportunity to speak to a school counsellor, you can email Meg Harper (Head of Counselling) at m.harper@warwickschool.org and arrange to come along for counselling. This would be with either Meg or with Gemma King.
- If you are concerned about your physical symptoms, you can talk to one of the school nurses and at our Medical Centre. You can just drop in or email MedicalCentre@warwickschool.org Alternatively, speak to your parents about consulting your GP or make an appointment yourself. You can do that at any age. Here is a link to some useful information about that:
<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/getting-help/visiting-your-doctor/#:~:text=Anyone%20can%20make%20an%20appointment,sure%20that%20you're%20safe.>
- You may wish to speak to the Chaplain in school. (At present, unfortunately, we don’t have a Chaplain but we hope to have one as soon as possible.)
- You may wish to speak to someone from your own faith community.

Difficult and Complex Deaths

Some deaths are very difficult indeed to adjust to. Examples include deaths through murder or violence, death by suicide or the loss of someone very young. Here are some links that might help you if something of that nature has caused your grief. Bear in mind that these websites are intended for adults but you may still find something helpful. With this type of death, however, you might find it best to talk to a qualified adult about your feelings, such as a counsellor, Chaplain, faith group leader or GP.

- Help is at Hand - support after someone may have died by suicide (pdf)
<https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Suicide/Documents/Help%20is%20at%20Hand.pdf>
- Support after a traumatic incident or murder
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/london/our-work/help-and-support/>

Websites

- Child Bereavement UK

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/get-support>

- Grief Encounter

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

- Hope Again - young people living after loss

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>

- Child Bereavement Network

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/help-around-a-death/what-you-can-do/for-young-people.aspx>

- Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

<https://uksobs.org/>

- Winston's Wish – support for young people after the death of a parent or sibling

www.winstonswish.org.uk

- Pet bereavement and pet loss

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

- Beyond Life (This site is aimed at adults but you may find it useful. It has lots of very practical information.)

<https://beyond.life/help-centre/grief-loss-bereavement/>

Further Reading/Book List

- Teenagers guide to getting on with life after death (pdf)

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/12583-Teenagers-Guide.pdf>

Most of the following books are in our school library:

Novels and Stories

- A Monster Calls - Patrick Ness
- Two Weeks with the Queen - Morris Gleitzman
- The Great Blue Yonder - Alex Shearer
- The Red Tree - Shaun Tan
- The Blackwater Lightship - Colm Toibin (written for adults)
- The Fault in Our Stars - John Green
- Five Feet Apart – Rachel Lippincott
- The Boy at the Back of the Class – Onjali Q Rauf
- Rebound – Kwame Alexander
- The Hate U Give – Angie Thomas
- Long Way Down – Jason Reynolds
- The Apple Tart of Hope – Sarah Moore Fitzgerald
- Artichoke Heart – Sita Brahmachari
- A Library of Lemons – Jo Cotterill
- My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece – Annabel Pitcher

Non-fiction

- Still Here with Me: Teenagers and Children on Losing a Parent - Suzanne Sjoqvist
- Sad Book – Michael Rosen
- What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies? -Trevor Romaine & Elizabeth Verdick
- Sometimes Life Sucks: When Someone You Love Dies - Molly Carlile

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