

Bereavement and Loss Workshop Part 2

How to Support Yourself
Through the Journey of
Loss and Grief.



From Newcastle. **For the world.**

The early stages of grief

Shock

People react in many different ways to the initial shock of losing a loved one. However you react is normal for you.

- **Some common responses include:**
Shouting, screaming, crying, emotional numbing, inability to speak, feeling scared, unsafe, anxious and difficulty in focusing.
- **We can also experience physical reactions such as sleep disruption, disturbing dreams and loss of appetite.**
- **We may have intrusive thoughts and flashbacks, including seeing, hearing or sensing the presence of the person who has died.**

Self Care and Support Strategies

- **Seek the help of family and friends. Let them know what you need e.g. not to be alone, a hug, to be able to talk about the person you have lost, help with practical tasks.**
- **If people ask "how can I help you ?" try and find something which would support you that they can do for you.**
- **Spend time in the place you feel safest – yours or someone else's home.**
- **Avoid situations and tasks that may feel too much or are difficult to focus on e.g driving or returning to work, or situations that may be stressful e.g. long journeys, visits to supermarkets and to large busy shopping centers.**
- **Sleep when you can, even if only for short periods of time, it is common to not want to sleep alone. Avoid caffeine and other stimulants that may prohibit sleep.**

Self Care and Support Strategies

- **Try to eat a little and often e.g. finger foods, nutritional tasty snacks.**
- **Try to make time for some gentle daily exercise e.g. walking in local parks, getting some fresh air, time spent in the garden.**
- **If you find yourself struggling to focus writing lists or memory aides on your phone or calendar can be helpful.**
- **Seek help and support from specialist bereavement support services available to you (see services signposted in handout).**

Self Care and Support Strategies

- **Allow yourself to express any emotions that surface: to cry, express anger, sadness, injustice and disbelief, or to not to feel.**
- **Don't be afraid of strong negative emotions, they are normal and will pass in time.**
- **Remember that although everything may feel entirely bleak at this is time it will not always feel this way.**

Grief over time

- **Expect to move between the different stages of grief over time.**
- **Anticipate and plan for times when you are likely to experience intense feelings of loss e.g. following the funeral when the reality of the death of a loved one often sinks in, and during significant anniversaries and events e.g. birthdays and Christmas etc.**
- **Seek the support of other family members or friends during these times. E.g. creating group gatherings/rituals to remember and celebrate your loved one, writing memorials or posts on social media to mark the anniversary or celebrate their life and achievements.**

Remembering your loved one

When you feel able allow yourself time to do the tasks associated with your grieving that are important to you e.g. creating a memory box to store things that hold important memories – photos, gifts, jewellery, items of clothing.

You may wish to save voice recordings of the loved one to remember their voice, or items of clothing that remind you of their smell. Visiting places that hold important memories of the loved one.

Managing Grief Over Time

Although grief is a normal and healthy process you may find it helpful to seek specialist bereavement counselling support in the later stages of grief and loss.

If you continue to experience intense negative emotions associated with the loss interfering with day to day functioning e.g. negative impacts on your capacity to study, return to work or meet your personal care needs, it may be beneficial to seek some professional support.

Managing Grief Over Time

Professional support may also be helpful if you have experienced complex or traumatic grief and continue to experience flashbacks and intrusive thoughts associated with this trauma.

Some people find it helpful to seek bereavement counselling several months following the death of their loved one if they sense that family and friends who were previously supportive expect them to have 'recovered', or if they fear 'burdening' others with their need to continue to talk about their grief.

Concluding Thoughts

- **Remember that grieving is a natural process and that your experience of grief is unique to you.**
- **Avoid trying to manage your grief alone and make use of all the informal and formal support available to you.**
- **Take care of your own emotional and physical needs and allow yourself to grieve in your own time.**

After today's workshop

- **Think of three things you can do to help yourself following this workshop. Think back to last week and how you might be able to practice some self-care for the rest of today.**

- **Think of three things you can ask others to do for you.**