

Grief & Bereavement

A guide for students and colleagues at Newcastle University in response to Covid-19

Bereavement, or grief, is a term used to describe the sense of loss felt when someone close to us or who we care about dies. It can be difficult and stressful and nearly everybody goes through it at some point in their lives.

This sense of loss may contain a range of emotions, such as sadness, anger, guilt, frustration and anxiety. Everyone experiences grief differently and there is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve. How we react will be influenced by many different things, including our age and personality, our cultural background and religious beliefs, our previous experiences of bereavement, our circumstances and how we cope with loss.

This guide is intended to provide some support to help you negotiate the next steps in your bereavement journey.

Caring for someone who is bereaved – some words of support

If you are caring for someone who has been bereaved it can be a daunting and stressful time. As well as supporting someone else through their grief you may well be grieving yourself. In addition to knowing how to help them as best you can, it's important also to know how to look after your own well-being.

In providing support you are undertaking an important role. The good news is that you do not need to be a professional or have significant training or experience to give help and support. Being friendly and compassionate goes a long way to helping those who experience grief.

This role can be challenging but remember that support is available to those caring for the bereaved too (see support section).

Covid-19 and Bereavement

The coronavirus (Covid-19) global pandemic has and will continue to result in loss of life across many countries including the UK. Many communities will experience loss as a result of this pandemic, including our own Newcastle University community.

A bereavement from Covid-19 is likely to be a very challenging kind of bereavement for most people. As a result, it is really important that people bereaved by Covid-19 receive care soon after their bereavement.

We know that early support and care for bereaved people can mean that it is easier, over time, to make a recovery with good mental health. By 'recovery' the aim is to enable the bereaved person to make the journey from grieving to remembering.

A death from Covid-19 may mean that there has been or will be:

- little time to prepare for a loved one's death following a period of illness due to Covid-19;
- no time spent with a loved one before they died due to the risk of infection and social distancing rules;

- an inability to say goodbye after death due to restrictions around attending funerals, public gatherings and travel;
- isolation issues as people may be grieving while separated from family and friends who may also be grieving but in other locations;
- practical challenges, for example if the person bereaved was previously receiving care from someone who has died and/or they have responsibilities to care for others or have ongoing work or family responsibilities;
- issues around coping with a shocking bereavement at a time when the bereaved person, or others in their circle of family and friends, may also be ill with Covid-19.
- additional concerns about the health of self/others, particularly if in the same household.

We are here to help and support you

Newcastle University is committed to providing support, advice, signposting and guidance to colleagues and students who are experiencing bereavement and loss.

You may know what sort of support you are looking for but, at what is often an overwhelming time, you may feel that you would like some help in working out where to start. Below you will find a range of support options that are available:

- Pastoral Support can be accessed by colleagues and students at pastoral.support@ncl.ac.uk or by contacting the University's Chaplaincy Team: chaplaincy@ncl.ac.uk
- Colleagues and postgraduate students can access support from the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) via the following mechanisms:
 - Free 24 hour confidential helpline: 0800 030 5182
Or for international calls: +44 0161 836 9498 (this will incur a charge).
 - [Web portal](#). Navigate to 'Contact us' and you will find a form to request support as well as self-help webinars and resources.
 - [Health Assured app](#) (install the app onto your mobile). There is a form to request support.

For all of the above you will need the following username and password:

Username: Newcastle Password: University

- Just Ask is our volunteer-led listening and signposting service for staff. Find out about JustAsk and how to contact a volunteer on our [JustAsk web pages](#).
- All students can book an [assessment appointment](#) with the counselling team
- Our [student wellbeing website](#) has a range of specialist support organisations you may find helpful but some particularly relevant organisations who have specific resources focussed on bereavement from Covid-19 are:
 - [Cruse Bereavement Care](#)
 - [Sudden](#)

Are you struggling and in need of urgent help?

If you're in distress and need support, you can ring Samaritans for free at any time of the day or night. Freephone (UK and Republic of Ireland): 116 123 (24 hours) or email: jo@samaritans.org

Further urgent and out of hours resources can be found [here](#).

Practical Concerns

If you are going through a bereavement you may have some very practical concerns about what you need to do and who you need to tell. If you have questions about the steps that need to be taken when someone has died, such as registering a death or planning a funeral you can find information on the government website [here](#).

If you are a student, you may want clarity about expectations and what your options are around your studies. The current situation has meant changes to how courses are being delivered and assessed and you will find more information about this on our [dedicated webpages](#). You may also wish to discuss your situation with your personal tutor/supervisor.

For colleagues please speak to your manager regarding support and time off work. A link to the Special Leave Policy which includes Bereavement Leave is [here](#).

Support from faith and belief communities

At a time of bereavement practical and spiritual support can also be found from a number of faith and belief communities. Contact details for Newcastle based faith communities can be found here, and other faith and belief resources are available:

- Churches Together in England (CTE) have a [summary page](#) on the situation during the Covid-19 pandemic. Other resources are available from a number of Christian traditions including the [Jesuits](#), the [Church of England](#), and the [Methodist Church](#).
- The Humanist [Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network](#) is available for support. There is also guidance available on funerals from [Humanists UK](#).
- The [Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service](#) is available to provide ongoing bereavement support.
- The Muslim Council of Britain lists a selection of Covid-19 [Volunteer Initiatives in the North East](#). They have also provided guidance around [burials](#).
- Support is also available through the University Chaplaincy (chaplaincy@ncl.ac.uk)

Digital Support Apps

- [Child Bereavement UK](#) offer an app for 11-25-year-olds who have been bereaved of someone important to them. It can also be used by friends, teachers, parents, and professionals who would like to know how to support bereaved young people. You can find out more [here](#).
- [Calm](#) offer an app to help you manage your mood in the grief process with meditation. You can find out more [here](#).

Other Digital Resources

- [NHS Choices](#) 'Grief after bereavement or loss' has information about how to cope and mental health and wellbeing.
- [What's Your Grief?](#) offers an online supportive community, resources and discussion about grief.
- [The Good Grief Trust](#) offers support and resources by others who have been bereaved.
- [The LOSS Foundation](#) has a short video describing the stages of grief = [Phases of Grief](#)
- [The Compassionate Friends](#) have a variety of online resources and have also compiled a suggested reading list with books categorised for ease of reference. See the list [here](#).

A note of encouragement

"That's really what grief has taught me. That I can survive. I used to be afraid that if I experienced grief it would overcome me and I wouldn't be able to survive the flood of it, that if I actually felt it I wouldn't be able to get back up. It's taught me that I can feel it and it won't swallow me whole. But we come from a culture where we think people have to be strong. I'm a big believer in being vulnerable, open to grief. That is strength. You can't know joy unless you know profound sadness. They don't exist without each other."

[On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss](#) by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler (2005)

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