

Bereavement and Young People

SHREWSBURY
COLLEGES GROUP

Losing someone important to you is one of the hardest things to experience in life. If you're young, bereavement can be even more difficult. But support and advice are available to help you get through it.

Your teenage years can be a lot of fun, but they are also often an emotional time. If someone close to you dies, it can be incredibly hard. Your world may feel as though it has crashed down around you.

It can make you feel very alone, especially as a young person, because you might find that none of your friends have gone through anything similar and won't understand or know what to say.

Your emotions after a bereavement

Grieving is a natural part of recovering from a bereavement, and everyone's experience of grief is different. There are no rules about what we should feel, and for how long. But many people find they feel a mixture of the following:

- sadness
- shock, particularly if the death was unexpected
- relief, if the death followed a long period of illness
- guilt and regret
- anger
- anxiety
- despair and helplessness
- depression.

These feelings may be very intense, particularly in the early days and weeks. Time eventually helps these intense emotions subside, and there's no need to feel guilty about starting to feel better. It doesn't mean you're not respecting the person's memory or forgetting about them.

There are several things that can help you start to feel better. Looking after your health and talking to someone will help you get through this difficult time.

Finding support for bereavement

Talking about your grief is an important part of getting through a bereavement. Choosing who to talk to about your feelings is a very personal decision. Sometimes the most unlikely person can actually offer the most support. If you've lost a family member, someone else in your family may also be good to open up to because they're likely to understand how you're feeling.

A close friend can be a good listener and a source of comfort and support, even if they haven't gone through this themselves.

There are lots of other sources of advice and support available, including:

- **websites and blogs** – such as Hope Again, a website for young people going through a bereavement, where you can find information, read other people's experiences, and add your own
- **helplines** – such as the Student Assistance Programme which is available 24/7 on 0800 028 3766 with trained counsellors ready to speak to you. There is also Cruse Bereavement young people's helpline on 0808 808 1677
- **your GP** – especially if you're concerned you're not coping, might be depressed, have trouble eating or sleeping, are thinking about hurting yourself, or you're not starting to feel better after a few months: they may suggest you have counselling
- **a teacher or tutor** – you may be distracted or find it hard to concentrate at school or college for a while, so talking to a teacher you feel comfortable with can help them understand what you're going through and take a bit of pressure off you; special circumstances, such as bereavement, can sometimes be taken into account if you're having trouble with coursework or exams.

Looking after yourself during a bereavement

During a time of grief you may not feel like looking after yourself, but it's important to help you cope with the extreme emotions that come with bereavement.

Some of the following quite simple things can make a big difference, such as:

- **eating** – you may lose your appetite, but try to keep eating as normally as possible: your body needs food, even if you don't want it; ideally, go for healthy, well-balanced meals
- **sleeping** – it can be hard to sleep when you're very upset, but there are some things that can help: read 10 tips to beat insomnia for more information
- **socialising** – seeing your friends and keeping up a normal social life may help take your mind off things and allow you to talk about how you're doing, if you want to; but don't feel guilty about not thinking about the person you've lost or having a good laugh with friends
- **exercising** – regular exercise can make you feel good and help you sleep (but avoid doing vigorous exercise close to bedtime); it can also be a relief to focus on something physical when you're going through an emotional time
- **avoiding smoking, drinking and taking drugs** – you may feel like smoking or drinking because you feel down, but your body has to work hard to deal with substances such as nicotine, alcohol or illegal drugs, especially when you're young, and they'll end up making you feel worse.