

Where can I get further help?

If you are concerned about managing your grief, make an appointment to see your GP or take a look at the Trust's website to see what services we offer and contact details. If you cannot get online please contact our Customer Services team on 0800 587 2108 for more details

Website – www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk

Follow us on Twitter to get updates on what we're doing: [@allofusinmind](https://twitter.com/allofusinmind)

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Booklets available in this series:

- Anger – How do I manage it?
- Baby Blues – How can I best deal with them?
- Confidence – How can I get some?
- Healthy Living – What should I do?
- Healthy Sex – How can I be sure?
- Low Moods – How can I feel better?
- My body, my health. Check it out!
- Pain – What can I do to help myself?
- Self Harm – How can I help myself?
- Shyness – How can I manage it?
- Sleep – How can I get some?
- Stress – How do I manage it?
- The end of life – How can I prepare for it?
- Worries – How can I best deal with them?

Your feedback is welcome

We invite you to share any comments, compliments, concerns or complaints you have about the Trust. Please speak to a member of staff or contact our customers services team on 0800 587 2108, who can also provide help in understanding this information, including in other formats.



Bereavement

How can I cope?

We are all individuals and no two people will react the same way to a situation. This is the same when someone we care for has died.

Some of us won't mention anything of our loss and will not cry at the funeral. We will resume 'normal' life seemingly quickly. Others find the heavy demands of looking after a family or working may mean that there just isn't the time to grieve and we put ourselves into overdrive. We may become more outgoing and throw ourselves into social situations to distract ourselves from our grief.

Similarly, when many of us have lost someone we love we may find that it takes a long time to get over the grief. We find everyday life a struggle and stop doing the things that used to interest us. Eventually we may find that we end up doing very little, spending a lot of time in bed or on our own staring at the TV. Through this we may not look after ourselves or our family properly.

“ I nursed my husband through a long period of illness and although I'm glad he isn't suffering anymore, I feel so lost and lonely. I can't fill the gap he has left ”

We may have other feelings such as:

- Shock and numbness
- Being overwhelmed with sadness
- Anger (this could be towards the person who died, the people around us or maybe even ourselves)
- Fear
- Guilt

These reactions and feelings are completely normal for a short time but if prolonged can turn into a cycle that is very difficult to get out of.

Generally, it is accepted that there are four main stages of bereavement:

- Accept that the loss of someone we care for is real
- React to the pain and grief at the loss
- Adjust to our life without that person
- Repair. Even though it may never feel like it, we will start to feel more like ourselves again.

Most of us will go through all these stages but not for the same length of time or intensity. We might feel out of control but it is important that we give ourselves time, know we are not alone and that these feelings should pass. It is also important to remember that there is no right or wrong way to grieve, everyone is an individual and should take the path that feels right to them.

You may want to think about the advice in this booklet to help you. Please note that this booklet is not intended as a substitute for a conversation with a healthcare professional, but we hope it can give you some help on how to cope with bereavement.

Step one: Keep a diary

Try to use a diary to help you plan your week in advance. This will help you organise your time and include some of the things you enjoy doing. You can use the page at the back of this booklet to jot down some notes. These notes can be for you or be used when speaking to someone.

Keep a note of the necessary jobs you need to do such as:

- Taking care of those you are responsible for such as children or pets
- Preparing meals
- Doing housework
- Attending appointments

Don't forget to include things you like doing and things that will help raise your mood.

Step two: Talk

Talk to someone

Pick up the phone and have a chat with a loved one or someone you trust. Family and friends can ease your troubles and help you see things in a different way. Don't be afraid to talk about the person who has died although it may be very upsetting at first, the more you talk the easier it will become. This will also help other people to realise that it's ok to talk about the person you have lost too.

However if it is too difficult to talk to those close to you then contact your local bereavement services through your GP, local hospice or the library. They can provide lots of support and advice about coping with bereavement.

Telling a child

You may have a young child that you need to talk to about the death of a loved one; here are ways that you can start that difficult conversation:

- Introduce the conversation by telling them you that you have something sad to say "I have some very sad news to tell you..."
- Questions may follow when the child is ready for more information and an explanation after you've told them about the death.
- If a person has been unwell, it can be helpful to build on what the child already knows "You know last time we saw grandpa and he was very unwell..."
- Reassure the child that asking questions is fine and you will try to answer everything the best you can.

 *I know my granddad was ready to go but I just miss him* 

Explaining what death means to young children

Exactly what you choose to say will depend on the circumstances and your own beliefs. Try to be honest and reassuring, say what feels right for you and the child. These are some ways you can use to explain to a young child the concept of death:

- "When somebody dies their body stops working. A dead body does not breathe because their lungs are no longer working and the heart has stopped. A dead body cannot move and it is very quiet and still. A dead body cannot feel anything so there will be no pain."

A young child can find it hard to grasp the difference between being dead and being alive, they may need to be reassured with words along the lines of the following:

- “Because their body has stopped working, dead people do not need anything to eat or to drink and they cannot feel cold. Dead people stay dead for ever, much as we might like them to, they cannot come back to life”

Try to use real words such as “died” and “death”. For all it may seem kinder to use phrases like “grandpa has gone to sleep for a very long time...” it can confuse a child.

After you’ve told the child the news they may show signs of being distressed, have nervous giggles or they may look blank as though nothing has happened. All of these reactions are normal.

Where there are parts you are unsure of yourself, be honest with the child and tell them that. Let them know that as soon as you find out you will tell them.

Some children may keep asking questions, or repeat the same one. Keep in mind that this is how young children make sense of things and try not to get frustrated if you find you are explaining the same things time and again.

“ I feel judged as I have been very social after my husband’s passing; I’m just trying to get back to normal ”

“ My mum was my rock, always there for me. I just don’t know how to cope without her ”

Step three: Try to look after yourself

Breathe

If you feel overwhelmed with your grief try to take a moment and just concentrate on slowly breathing air into your body, and with each breath you exhale try to feel the calm surround you. If you need to cry then let it out. Close your eyes and imagine you’re in a calm place; this will help your mind and body to relax.

Keep yourself healthy

Maintain a healthy lifestyle and try to avoid relying on caffeine, alcohol or drugs to cope. These things may seem to help in the short term but will ultimately create long term problems. Instead look for support from your friends or family or from a local support group.

It might sound like a cliché but exercise is a great way to improve your overall wellbeing. It doesn’t have to be hard; try going for a walk, swimming or just stretching. Get your body moving and your blood pumping in a positive way.

Sleep

Make sure you get enough sleep. Not getting enough sleep can have a massive impact on the way we feel as we are more likely to be irritable and negative if tired. On the other hand too much sleep can leave us feeling heavy and lethargic. You can find out more about sleep and tips to help if you’re experiencing problems in our leaflet ‘Sleep – how do I get some?’ available on our website.

Get out and about

Although you may find it difficult to get ready and go out, try to be as sociable as possible. It may be strange at first, especially if you are used to socialising with the person you have lost, but it will get easier. Socialising will give you a few hours distraction and also strengthen your friendships.

If a lot of your time was spent caring for the person who has died you may find that you have a lot of spare time now. It is normal to feel a 'void' in your life and it's important to fill that void doing something practical or positive.

Be creative

Writing, making music, dancing or painting can be a great way to ease tension and express how you feel inside. If you're wondering where to start, take a look at the Trust's Creative Minds initiative – which supports local creative projects that you may be able to join.

Visit www.creativemindsuk.com to find out more.

Make yourself feel better

Sometimes treating ourselves can uplift our mood and make us feel a little better. It doesn't have to be expensive; just something that you want like a new book, film or some nice food. Don't feel guilty for treating yourself, this may help you feel better about life which will in turn have a positive effect on your friends and family.

Challenge yourself

Set yourself a new challenge or goal such as getting out and doing some gardening or joining a group. Try something new and be proud of everything you accomplish. By being proactive you can distract yourself for a short time and become emotionally stronger which in turn will make you feel more able to handle traumatic events.

Support groups

Join a local support group; meeting new people who are dealing with a similar situation may help you deal with your grief. If this seems too daunting at first, ask a friend, family member or someone you trust to go with you.

Memory box

When you are ready you may want to create a memory box with treasured objects that remind you of the fond memories you have of the person who has died. You can include things like photographs, ticket stubs, a favourite piece of clothing, letters or emails you have received from them. These are all things you may want to look back on over time.

Step four: Let's start a conversation

If you feel your grief is starting to have an impact on your life, talk to a health care professional such as your GP. You will be able to talk openly with them and they can help you decide how is best to help you move forward.

