



GOING THROUGH

BEREAVEMENT

Explains bereavement and grief, looks at what this can look and feel like. There are also included some helpful exercises to do if suffering a bereavement as well as some useful links for more support and information.

- What is Bereavement? Page 2
- What is grief?..... Page 3
- Understanding Grief..... Page 8
- How to look after yourself?..... Page 10
- Helpful exercises Page 11
- Other useful info..... Page 15



What is Bereavement?

Bereavement happens when we have lost someone important to us. As we begin to adjust to the loss the feelings and emotions that come up are characterised by grief. Grief can be different for everyone and can be expressed in different ways. Losing someone important to us is one of the hardest things to experience and can be emotionally devastating. Losing someone close to you is incredibly hard and may feel as though your world has crashed down around you. Dealing with a loss can be very isolating as a young person, especially if none of your friends/peers have gone through this before and don't understand how you're feeling or what to say.

Common emotions to feel after bereavement

Dealing with grief is a natural and sometimes confusing experience. There isn't necessarily a correct way to feel or grieve after you have lost someone. Grief is incredibly personal and there are no rules for how or how long this should last.

Some common feelings to feel are:

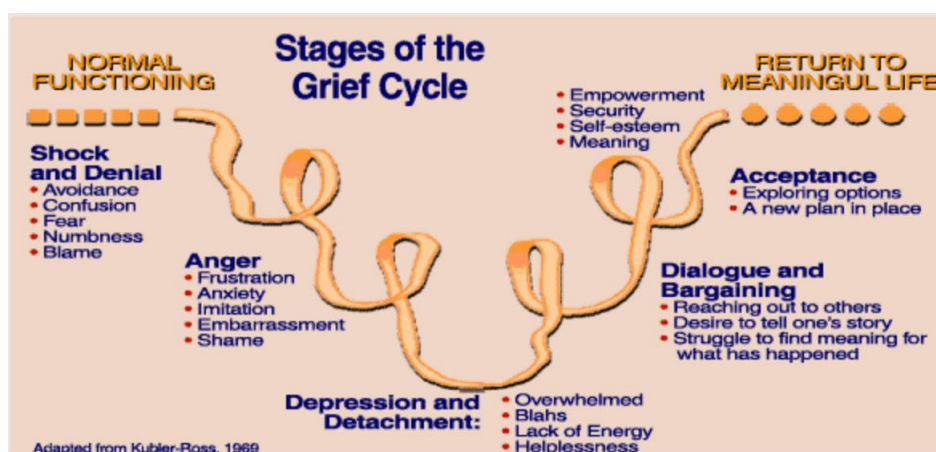
- Sadness
- Shock, this can result in numbness and is a common first reaction to loss and can sometimes feel like you're in a daze.
- Relief, this can be surprising, but is common if the person lost was in great pain or suffering from a long illness.
- Guilt
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Despair, often paired with tiredness and exhaustion
- Depression

These feelings might not be constant and strong sometimes overwhelming feelings may appear unexpectedly and at surprising times. Sometimes it can be hard to link together that the bereavement is the reason you are feeling the way you are. Your family may react and feel different to you after a bereavement.

What is grief

The Five Stages of Grief – Elizabeth Kubler Ross and David Kessler

The five stages, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance are a part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with the one we lost. **They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling. But they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief.** Not everyone goes through all of them or in a prescribed order. Our hope is that with these stages comes the knowledge of grief's terrain, making us better equipped to cope with life and loss. At times, people in grief will often report more stages. Just remember your grief is as unique as you are



The five stages of grief

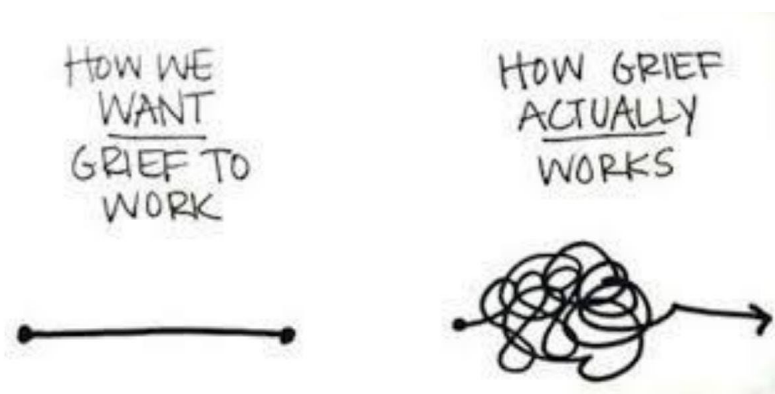
Denial - Denial is the first of the five stages of grief. It helps us to survive the loss. In this stage, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense. We are in a state of shock and denial. We go numb. We wonder how we can go on, if we can go on, why we should go on. We try to find a way to simply get through each day. Denial and shock help us to cope and make survival possible. Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief. There is a grace in denial. It is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle. As you accept the reality of the loss and start to ask yourself questions, you are unknowingly beginning the healing process. You are becoming stronger, and the denial is beginning to fade. But as you proceed, all the feelings you were denying begin to surface

Anger - Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process. Be willing to feel your anger, even though it may seem endless. The more you truly feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate and the more you will heal. There are many other emotions under the anger, and you will get to them in time, but anger is the emotion we are most used to managing. The truth is that anger has no limits. It can extend not only to your friends, the doctors, your family, yourself and your loved one who died, but also to God. You may ask, "Where is God in this? Underneath anger is pain, your pain. It is natural to feel deserted and abandoned, but we live in a society that fears anger. Anger is strength and it can be an anchor, giving temporary structure to the nothingness of loss. At first grief feels like being lost at sea: no connection to anything. Then you get angry at someone, maybe a person who didn't attend the funeral, maybe a person who isn't around, maybe a person who is different now that your loved one has died. Suddenly you have a structure – your anger toward them. The anger becomes a bridge over the open sea, a connection from you to them. It is something to hold onto; and a connection made from the strength of anger feels better than nothing. We usually know more about suppressing anger than feeling it. The anger is just another indication of the intensity of your love.

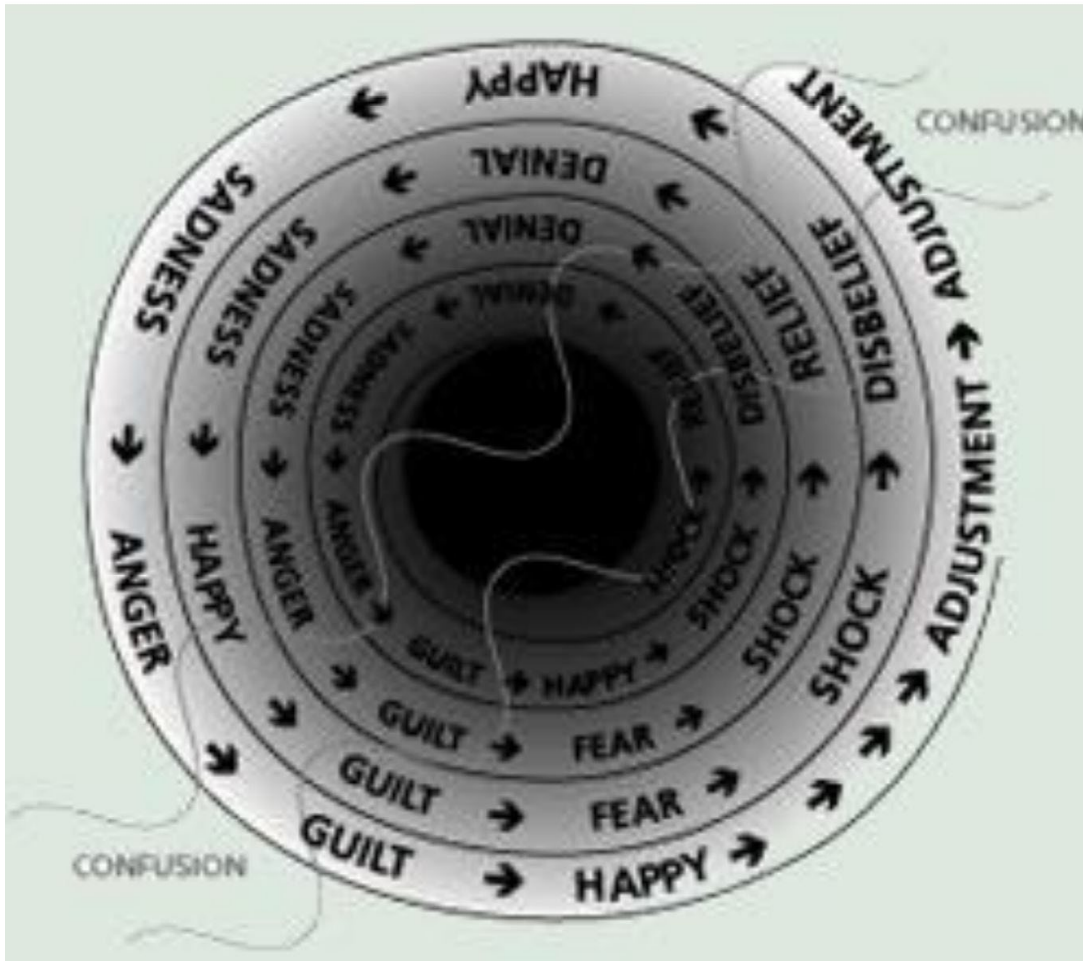
Bargaining - Before a loss, it seems like you will do anything if only your loved one would be spared. "Please God," you bargain, "I will never be angry at my wife again if you'll just let her live." After a loss, bargaining may take the form of a temporary truce. "What if I devote the rest of my life to helping others. Then can I wake up and realize this has all been a bad dream?" We become lost in a maze of "If only..." or "What if..." statements. We want life returned to what is was; we want our loved one restored. We want to go back in time: find the tumor sooner, recognize the illness more quickly, stop the accident from happening...if only, if only, if only. Guilt is often bargaining's companion. The "if onlys" cause us to find fault in ourselves and what we "think" we could have done differently. We may even bargain with the pain. We will do anything not to feel the pain of this loss. We remain in the past, trying to negotiate our way out of the hurt. People often think of the stages as lasting weeks or months. They forget that the stages are responses to feelings that can last for minutes or hours as we flip in and out of one and then another. We do not enter and leave each individual stage in a linear fashion. We may feel one, then another and back again to the first one.

Depression - After bargaining, our attention moves squarely into the present. Empty feelings present themselves, and grief enters our lives on a deeper level, deeper than we ever imagined. This 5 offtherecord-banes.co.uk depressive stage feels as though it will last forever. It's important to understand that this depression is not a sign of mental illness. It is the appropriate response to a great loss. We withdraw from life, left in a fog of intense sadness, wondering, perhaps, if there is any point in going on alone? Why go on at all? Depression after a loss is too often seen as unnatural: a state to be fixed, something to snap out of. The first question to ask yourself is whether or not the situation you're in is actually depressing. The loss of a loved one is a very depressing situation, and depression is a normal and appropriate response. To not experience depression after a loved one dies would be unusual. When a loss fully settles in your soul, the realization that your loved one didn't get better this time and is not coming back is understandably depressing. If grief is a process of healing, then depression is one of the many necessary steps along the way.

Acceptance - Acceptance is often confused with the notion of being "all right" or "OK" with what has happened. This is not the case. Most people don't ever feel OK or all right about the loss of a loved one. This stage is about accepting the reality that our loved one is physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality. We will never like this reality or make it OK, but eventually we accept it. We learn to live with it. It is the new norm with which we must learn to live. We must try to live now in a world where our loved one is missing. In resisting this new norm, at first many people want to maintain life as it was before a loved one died. In time, through bits and pieces of acceptance, however, we see that we cannot maintain the past intact. It has been forever changed and we must readjust. We must learn to reorganize roles, re-assign them to others or take them on ourselves. Finding acceptance may be just having more good days than bad ones. As we begin to live again and enjoy our life, we often feel that in doing so, we are betraying our loved one. We can never replace what has been lost, but we can make new connections, new meaningful relationships, new inter-dependencies. Instead of denying our feelings, we listen to our needs; we move, we change, we grow, we evolve. We may start to reach out to others and become involved in their lives. We invest in our friendships and in our relationship with ourselves. We begin to live again, but we cannot do so until we have given grief its time



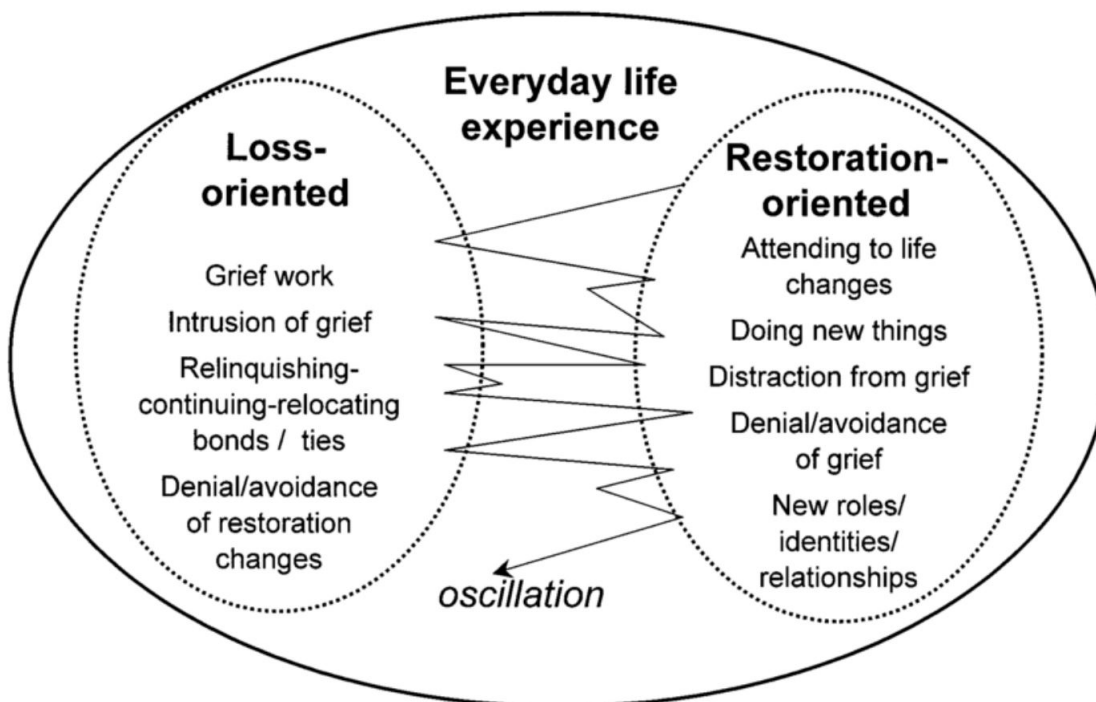
How grief works?



For in grief nothing “stays put.” One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles, or dare I hope I am on a spiral? –C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* What feels like a crazy rollercoaster of emotions following grief actually being a gradual spiral outwards that allows the intensity of feelings to reduce and a greater sense of spaciousness to develop. This can be a helpful image for young people and allow them to hold onto a sense of hope and order in the maelstrom of feelings.

Dual Process Model of Grief

In healthy grieving the person moves between the two – allowing time for remembering and sadness while also having periods of getting on with things. So many young people feel guilty for moments of 'forgetting' but it does not mean they are not grieving or that the lost person meant less to them. It can be very helpful for young people to know this is normal.



Understanding Grief

Tonkin's Model of Grief

Tonkin's model of grief challenges the idea that 'time heals all wounds' or that grief disappears with time. Indeed, if you have recently lost a loved one, you might feel as though it is impossible to ever move on from grief. Dr Tonkin suggests that this is because we do not move on from grief, but grow around it.

Imagine drawing a circle to represent yourself. This is you, your life and everything you're experiencing. Now you shade in the circle to represent your grief.

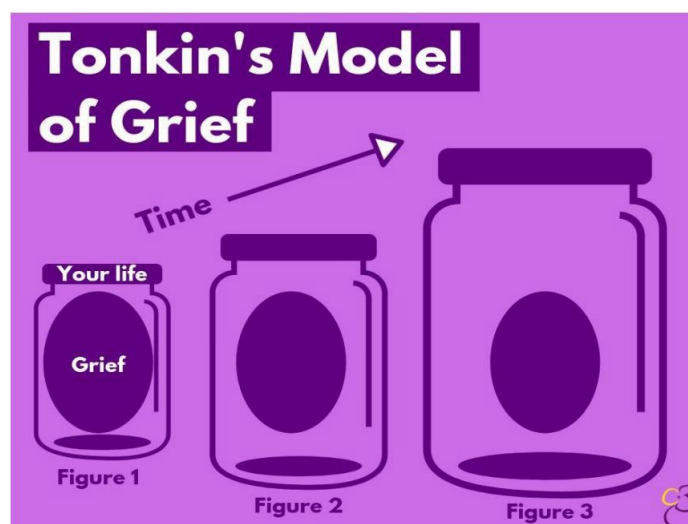
The result is a circle, almost entirely shaded. This is you and your grief; it may be entirely consuming your life. You may feel unable to eat or sleep, or find yourself struggling to think about anything else.

What happens in the following days, months and years is important. Rather than the shaded area growing smaller, the outer circle (representing you) begins to grow bigger. The result looks somewhat like a fried egg, with the white representing your life and the yolk representing your grief – therefore this model of grief is sometimes referred to as the fried egg model.

Tonkin's theory of grief suggests that over time, your grief will stay much the same, but your life will begin to grow around it. You will have new experiences, meet new people, and begin to find moments of enjoyment. Slowly, these moments may grow more frequent and the outer circle will grow a little bigger.

Eventually, there will be a much larger circle, with the same size shaded area – but the grief is not as dominant overall. This is why Tonkin's model of grief is called growing around grief.

This does not mean the grief disappears. It will probably always be there and may even grow a little bigger at difficult times. But it no longer completely dominates the circle.



The Ball and the Box analogy - Herschel

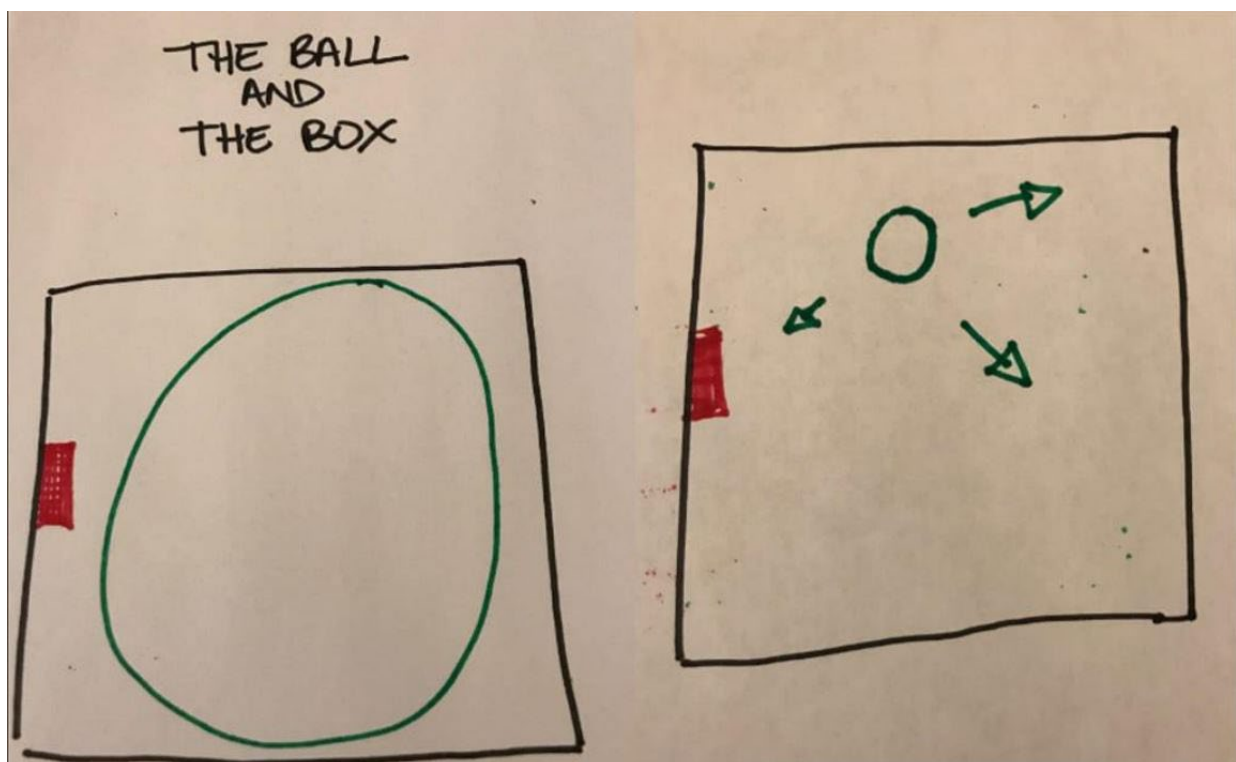
Herschel drew a box with a ball inside. On the left side of the box is a red "button." She explained that "When grief is new, the ball takes up most of the box and is constantly hitting the button, which causes pain, over and over again."

The pain is fairly constant in the beginning. "Because the ball is huge, you can't move the box without the ball hitting the pain button. It rattles around on its own in there and hits the button over and over. You can't control it - it just keeps hurting. Sometimes it seems unrelenting."

Herschel explains, "Over time, the ball shrinks — but every now and then, it still hits the button. Maybe you see someone who reminds you of your loved one. Maybe a certain song plays on the radio. Maybe it comes out of nowhere."

One of the hardest parts about dealing with grief is accepting the fact that the feeling never really goes away. The feelings may lessen in intensity, but the sense of loss is always there. Herschel goes on to explain, "For most people, the ball never really goes away. It might hit less and less, giving you more time to recover between hits, unlike when the ball was still giant-sized."

There is no timetable for dealing with your grief. It can take time for the ball in your box to shrink. You shouldn't feel rushed into getting "over" your grief, and you definitely shouldn't feel judged for grieving, no matter how long ago it started.





How to look after yourself during a bereavement

During a bereavement you may not feel like looking after yourself. It is important to look after yourself to help you cope with the emotions that come from bereavement.

- **Eating** - losing your appetite but trying to keep to your normal eating patterns is important, your body needs food.
- **Sleeping** - you may feel like things are on your mind while you're trying to go to sleep, it can be hard to go to sleep when you're feeling upset. If you're struggling with your sleep see our booklet on sleep.
- **Socialising** - seeing people you would in a normal day like friends, colleagues, classmates may be able to help a little to take your mind off your grief and enable you to talk about how you're doing or to talk about something completely unrelated, either could be very beneficial to you.
- **Exercising** - regular exercise is always good for you, it can leave you with more positive feelings and can aid if you are having sleep problems. Going through a bereavement is an incredibly emotional time it may be a good thing to be able to focus on something physical.
- **Research** - Certain websites and blogs such as Hope Again can help you process how you've been feeling by reading experiences of other young people going through similar experiences. You can also add your own experience if you wish. Websites can also offer information and advice.

Helpful bereavement exercises

Salt sculpture:

You may like to make a coloured 'Salt Sculpture' to help you remember important things about the person who has died.

You will need:

- A small jar with a lid and a wide neck (e.g., baby food jar)
- Salt
- 5 coloured chalks
- 6 pieces of paper

What to do:

1. Fill your jar to the brim with salt. On one of the pieces of paper write down 5 things you remember about the person who has died. These could be things you know they liked, something they enjoyed doing, perhaps somewhere you went together or what you remember about them as a person. Then choose a different colour to represent each memory and put a dot of that colour next to each memory.
2. Spread out 5 sheets of paper and divide the salt from the jar between them.
3. Then colour each pile of salt using one of the 5 chalks. Rub each chalk backwards and forwards into the salt. The salt will begin to take on the colour of the chalk. The harder you rub the brighter the coloured salt will become.
4. Carefully pick up each piece of paper and pour the coloured salts into your jar one at a time. (If you tilt your jar you can make waves of colour appear).
5. When all the colours have added, hold the jar and tap it down on a work surface to settle the salt. Do not shake the jar unless you want to mix up all the colours. Then fill any remaining space with plain salt (right up to the very top!) This is important and will prevent the colours mixing.
6. Secure the lid firmly and use some sellotape to hold it in place. Try to keep your list of what the colours mean to you close by your jar. You may like to show other people in your family your 'jar of memories' or think of a special place where you can put your jar.

Helpful bereavement exercises

Writing a goodbye letter:

The goal of this grief worksheet is to build positive meaning associated with the lost relationship, and to begin moving toward closure. This helps to be able to process your grief by describing who you are saying goodbye to, remembering special memories spent with them and anything learned from this relationship.

Goodbye Letter

To: _____

I am saying goodbye because _____

Saying goodbye makes me feel _____

I remember a time when we _____

You taught me _____

Something I want you to know is _____

I will always remember _____

From: _____

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Helpful bereavement exercises

Grief sentence completion:

This exercise can help with being able to open up and talk about your grief. Talking about a loss can be difficult but this worksheet may help you to express yourself with the help from the prompts.

Grief Sentence Completion

Right now, I feel... _____

I feel the saddest when... _____

The thing I miss most about the person I lost is... _____

Since the loss, things have been different because... _____

My family usually feels... _____

If I could ask the person I lost one thing, I would ask... _____

Something I liked about the person who I lost was... _____

One thing I learned from the person who I lost is... _____

Helpful bereavement exercises

From “Winston’s wish” website: Ways to remember someone who has died on special occasions and anniversaries:

- 1.** Set aside a special place on that day in which to remember the person who died. You could light a candle, put up a photograph or place items that remind you of things you may have done with them in previous years. Family members can spend time alone or together in this place, taking a few moments to remember.
- 2.** Make or write a card. You could take this to the grave or to where their ashes are scattered, or just keep it in your home – children can choose where it feels right to put it.
- 3.** Ask family members or friends to write special messages or note down some memories and send them to you. You could keep them in a book or a box or you could stick them to a mirror or the wall.
- 4.** Listen to their favourite music or watch one of their favourite films.
- 5.** Begin to make (or add to) a memory box in which to keep things that remind you of the person e.g. photos, shells, tickets, aftershave, lipstick...
- 6.** Create a digital memory board of special photos or post a photo of them on social media. Ask other people for their photos of the person who died and begin to compile their ‘life story’ in pictures. If appropriate, you could include memories from the day you are remembering.
- 7.** Cook their favourite meal or cake or order their favourite takeaway.
- 8.** Write them a letter, a poem, or a song. Maybe you could start with something like: “If you came back for just five minutes, I’d tell you...”
- 9.** Spend time with others who would also like to remember the person on that day; this can be physically together, but it can also be through video calls, where you can all see each other and have time to talk and support one another.
- 10.** Treat yourself to something that has a connection to the person who died and reminds you of them.



Other helpful resources

Cruse: largest UK bereavement charity, they provide free care and bereavement counselling to people suffering from grief. <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Hope Again: Young people coping with bereavement and living after loss. A website from Cruse bereavement. <https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>

Winston's Wish: UK's childhood bereavement charity. Supporting children and their families after the death of a parent or sibling. <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Rainbow Centre: for children affected by cancer, life-threatening illness or bereavement www.rainbowcentre.org.uk

Help is at Hand: Emotional and practical support for people affected by a bereavement by suicide. <https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/resource/help-is-at-hand/>

Child Bereavement UK: This list covers books and resources for children and families affected by a sudden or unexpected death, including accidents, suicide and homicide. <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/resources-for-bereavement-by-sudden-death>

Books and resources: <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>

Interactive website for young people about cancer: www.whybother.org.uk

Papyrus: Hope line for the prevention of young suicide. <https://papyrus-uk.org/>. 0800 0684141

Road4you: <http://hopeagain.org.uk/> What is grief + Meditation <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/grief>