

Coping with bereavement and loss during the COVID 19 situation

A self-help guide to support NPT CBC staff



Developed by Neath Port Talbot Educational
Psychology Service

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With reference to: 'SUDDEN': <https://www.suddendeadth.org/covid-19-bereavement/advice-for-bereaved-people>

Bereavement and loss during the COVID 19 situation

During the global COVID 19 pandemic, caused by a virus called coronavirus, we are facing a tragic loss of life, often under very difficult circumstances. Please refer to 'Bereavement: A self help guide', funded by Western Bay Health and Social Care Programme for general information related to bereavement and loss; how people feel when they have experienced bereavement and loss; how people begin to recover from bereavement etc. Please also see the document developed by Neath Port Talbot Educational Psychology and School Based Counselling Service for information and resources specifically to support children with loss and bereavement: '[A GUIDE TO BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID 19 SITUATION](#)'.

This self-help guide has been developed in response to the pandemic and aims to provide a guide to support adults who face the impact of bereavement due to COVID 19. A bereavement from COVID-19 is likely to be a very challenging kind of bereavement for most people. It is really important that people bereaved by COVID-19 are cared for and receive support, especially in the first days and weeks following their bereavement. Research has evidenced that early self-care, care from people immediately around us, and care from others too, can mean that it is easier, over time, to make a recovery, with good mental health.

Without early care, traumatically bereaved people are more likely to develop life-impairing illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

A death from COVID-19 is likely to mean that:

- There is little time to prepare for a loved one's death, following a period of illness that they suffered
- There may be little or no time spent with a loved one before they died, due to the risk of infection



- People who are grieving may not be able to say goodbye after the death during this time of pandemic, as there are restrictions on gatherings of people and funerals.
- People who are grieving may be separated from loved ones who are also grieving but in other locations, as people are restricted from moving around and may also be socially isolating.
- There may be practical challenges, for example if the person bereaved was previously receiving care from someone who died, or they have responsibilities to care for others or to continue working.
- It may be that people are 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.

People bereaved by COVID-19 due to coronavirus will feel incredibly sad as they are experiencing the shock of a loved one dying suddenly, often after a very short period of illness.

Due to current government restrictions put in place to slow the spread of coronavirus which include social distancing and self-isolation, it may mean that many people are not able to spend time with their loved one as they are dying. They may not be able to say 'goodbye' by spending time with their loved one's body afterwards or hold a normal memorial or funeral.

Faced with this particularly challenging type of bereavement, people may experience a range of difficult feelings and symptoms. The way in which you react is normal for you, and understandable in the circumstances. The most important thing is to look after yourself at the moment which will help your recovery. Family and friends will also be able to provide care and support to anyone who is grieving.



Common reactions you may experience



The information below gives details of common and normal reactions experienced by people who are bereaved suddenly.

Sadness, shock and disbelief

As well as being sad, some people may think about events leading up to a death repeatedly, for example seeing a loved one very unwell. It may feel as though the person who died is going to walk in the room. When you wake up, you may feel that it can't be true.

Numbness and exhaustion

You may feel overwhelmed and unable to move much, concentrate or communicate well. Things may feel pointless and you may feel unable to get on with things without making simple mistakes.

Frightened or panicky or a sense of "if only".

Particularly at this time of the COVID 19 situation you may worry about more deaths happening. You may find you get stressed and worried about things that normally you could cope with. You may feel angry, for example that plans are ruined or you may have dreams that scare you. You may wish that you had spent more time with the person who has died before they became ill, or told them that you loved them more. Or you may wish that you had not had arguments with them.

Physical symptoms

You may feel jumpy, tense, or restless. Some people shake, sweat or cannot speak normally; or have aches and pains such as headaches or stomach upsets; or feel they are choking. You may struggle to sleep or eat as you normally would.

Loneliness

You may feel lonely, particularly if you are self-isolating, due to the risk of infection. You may feel no-one understands what you are going through.



Ways to help you cope following bereavement

A sudden death is very challenging for anyone to experience and it is important to remember your reactions are normal. This section provides some advice and ideas on how you can help care for yourself at this difficult time. Caring for yourself and seeking help from friends and family, and other people who care for you, will help you to cope at this time.

Support from others

Talking with people you love, or others who can care for you at this time, sharing what you are going through, rather than trying to cope on your own can be very comforting. Evidence from research has demonstrated that people who support each other are less likely to develop ongoing conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression.

If you live with family members or friends, find time to talk with each other, share your feelings and support each other. You may experience very different reactions at different times. Try to be understanding of each other during these different reactions.

Due to the need to prevent the spread of coronavirus you may be separated from loved ones. Talk with them over the phone, or by digital means including a video call. Video enables you to see someone's face and kind eyes, which many people find helps them to connect and feel supported.

If you are feeling isolated, but have friends elsewhere, let them know what you are going through, by phone or in other, digital, ways; for example if you talk to friends normally through social media. Social media means many of us can reach out to groups of people who can support us. You may think that friends aren't close enough, don't understand, or will be too busy. But friends can be enormously helpful at this time.

Grief and isolation during the coronavirus outbreak

-  Keep in regular contact with others (via telephone or social media)
-  Look after yourself and get rest
-  Seek practical help from friends, family or neighbours
-  Don't feel guilty if you are struggling
-  Reach out if you know someone else who is struggling
-  Contact the Cruse Freephone National Helpline (0808 808 1677)



<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/traumatic-bereavement/coping-with-a-crisis>

Bereavement and social support helplines can help.

It can help to talk to someone outside your normal circles sometimes. If you are feeling isolated, and feel you have no family or friends, it is particularly important to seek help over the phone. There are some support organisations listed at the back of this guide.

If you are at home with other people, isolating together in order to stop the spread of coronavirus, it may be hard to be kind to each other all the time. If someone says something that you consider hurtful, remember they probably did not mean to hurt you. They may not know what to say or were dealing with their own, challenging feelings and not thinking about your feelings.

Caring for children

The needs of children are, in many ways, similar to the needs of adults. It is important for children to understand what has happened, and to be given opportunities to talk about it and feel supported. Please see the document developed by Neath Port Talbot Educational Psychology and School Based Counselling Service for information and resources specifically to support children with their loss: '[A GUIDE TO BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID 19 SITUATION](#)'.

You may really miss the experience of being hugged or held, due to social distancing or self-isolation at home. Try to think of other things that may give you a small sense of comfort. For example, getting warm under a duvet, or cuddling a pet, having a warm bath, or sitting in some sunshine for a while.

Physical symptoms

If you have physical symptoms at this time, be aware that some of these may be due to your bereavement. However, if you are concerned that you may be unwell for another reason, including COVID-19 (coronavirus disease), you should seek medical advice.

If you are confined to your home in order to stop the spread of coronavirus, try to find ways to think of it as a place where you should look after yourself at this important time of grieving. Do things slowly and carefully so you stay safe. For example, when pouring boiling water out a kettle. Try to do just one thing at a time. Avoid driving if you can.

From your home, you may want to do things that help you remember the person who has died. Some people find it helpful to create memory boxes containing things that belonged to their loved one, or frame photographs, or write about their loved one.

Let out your feelings

Crying can help. Listening to favourite music can help. Some people find it helps to express themselves, for example through writing or painting or doing something that reminds them of the person who has died.

Look after your physical wellbeing

Eat little and often. Listen to how your body is feeling and eat what you want, when you feel like it. It is important to stay hydrated. Hot, sugary drinks can be helpful. Avoid caffeine and alcohol.

Sleep when you can, even if only for a few hours at a time. If you feel you need help sleeping, talk to your GP. Physical exercise such as a short walk from your home for a change of scenery, gardening, or gentle movement such as yoga may be helpful. Do not over-exercise yourself to the point of exhaustion.

Breathing in and out deeply and slowly if you feel panicky, for a few minutes can be calming. Sit somewhere peaceful. Breathe fully in, and count to five, breathe fully out, and count to five, and so on, for a minute.

Remember, it will not always feel this way

Take each moment as it comes. Your reactions and behaviours at this time are normal and this is a very challenging time. You will feel better in the future and you will be able to move on to a new life.

Many people find that about a month after a sudden bereavement they start to feel a bit better. They accept the death, and can move forward with their life, even though they feel sad and remember with sorrow what has happened. However, some people continue to experience very challenging thoughts and reactions, and these can be symptoms of conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). If you are experiencing very challenging thoughts and reactions, you may need to seek further help from your GP. You may benefit from a course of therapy from a qualified counsellor.

Grieving takes time and it's important to make time for it. It can be helpful to know that other people bereaved in sudden and distressing ways have gone on to lead full and happy lives, while still remembering with sorrow what has happened.



Take care of yourself



The death of someone close to you can be very overwhelming and you will feel a mixture of emotions. Here is a summary of things you can do that may help you to cope and to be aware that there are people who can support if you need it.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF	Grief is painful. Whilst self-compassion is not the cultural norm it should be. Treat yourself as you would treat a beloved friend, in word, thought and deed. Give yourself space to feel the pain of grief and also give yourself permission to take 'timeout' when you need it.
GET ENOUGH REST	Practice good sleep hygiene. Insomnia and excess sleeping are common during this time. Setting regular bedtime and wake times may be helpful. Meditation/sleep stories can help with insomnia and inducing rest.
BREATHE MINDFULLY	Breathing fully with intention accomplishes two things: 1) It turns off the stress response known as 'flight or flight' 2) It helps you to focus on the present moment which can stimulate mental wellbeing.
MOVE	Physical movement can help your body release tension associated with grief- a short walk among nature yoga or cardiovascular exercise will contribute to better sleep and improved wellbeing.
EAT HEALTHY	Food can have a big impact on how you feel emotionally. Nutritious food can also protect your ability to stay physically well, which is often compromised by the high stress that comes with loss. Drinking plenty of water will help your physical and mental state. Alcohol should be limited as it can depress your mood and sleep schedule.
CONNECT WITH OTHERS/SEEK SUPPORT	'Social distancing' may make it difficult to connect with family and friends during the COVID 19 outbreak. However, there are still many ways that you can reach out to people and nurture relationships with other family members and friends- through phone calls or online video calling. There are also helping line services available when things get tough (see list of organisations).

Memorials

During the COVID 19 pandemic, restrictions on gatherings mean bereaved people may not be able to attend funerals. We may have to remember people who have died in ways that are different to normal. This may feel very hard if you would normally come together in person with a lot of family and friends to support each other. People who may be able to offer you helpful advice at this time include faith and cultural leaders and funeral directors.

Coping if you have to miss a funeral:

- ✿ Ask the funeral director if the service can be recorded or live streamed
- ✿ Write or record a message to be played
- ✿ Set aside the time while the funeral is taking place to have your own memorial at home
- ✿ Ask someone who is attending to call you afterwards
- ✿ Hold your own memorial at a later date when the restrictions are lifted
- ✿ Contact the Cruse Freephone National Helpline (0808 808 1677)

Here are some ideas that may be helpful to you:

A special place

It may be helpful to set up a special place in your home where you can go to think about your loved one. You could include a photo of them and perhaps some flowers or something else that you consider special.

It may be helpful to walk to a special place to remember your loved one, perhaps as part of a regular exercise regime. For example, a particular tree in a park. Gentle exercise may be helpful at this time.

Planning with others

Take your time, with other people, planning an event you want to hold after the pandemic is over. Planning an event provides an opportunity to talk about someone who has died and how you all want to remember or celebrate their life. Talking with other people can be very comforting.

It may not be possible to know when this event can take place, but you can decide what you would like to happen at it and tell people they will be invited when it is safe to arrange a date.

You could plan to hold the event in a particular place that was important to your loved one, or to hold it on a special date next year such as their birthday or on the anniversary of the day they died.

A memorial event in your home

If you are self-isolating with other people who loved the person who has died, you might decide to hold a small memorial event in your home.

You might want to consider each of you speaking for a short time to share memories, listening to music, reading out a poem, or saying a prayer, or doing something else that has meaning to you all. Focus on your loved one's life to decide what to do.

Think about what you are going to do after your event to help you support each other. One idea is to make and share a meal together. Perhaps include food that the person who died loved to eat.

Sharing memories online

You may want to invite friends and family to share memories and photos of the person who has died. Some people use private pages on social media, or you could use private group chats on messaging services, or a group email.

A memorial event online

It is possible to use modern technology to gather people together in a virtual room to remember the person who has died and offer love and support to each other. Talk about this idea with people you love and decide if this is what you would like to do. For example, you could use Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp or Facetime. You could do this as well as planning an event for after the pandemic is over.

Ideas for planning an online event:

- Decide an agreed date and time and how long it will last.
- Find someone in your family, or a family friend or helper in your community, who is good with technology, to coordinate it and help everyone to join in.
- Plan what is going to happen and when. Send people the programme in an email so they know what to expect. For example, length of eulogies and who will read them out, any music you want to be played, or songs sung, or opportunities for people to say things or do things together or pray together.
- You may want to choose someone to lead the event. This could be someone within your family, a family friend, or a professional who normally leads an event such as a funeral.

Making memories last

Here are some ideas that have been used by other people to remember their loved one who has died.

- Place a notice of your loved one's death in a newspaper to honour their life.
- Write a eulogy or poem that celebrates your loved one. You could email it to family and friends, or post it on social media, perhaps with a photo. After the pandemic is over, you could read it out at a gathering.
- Make a collage of photos of your loved one that you frame. Or post pictures, or a slide show, on a social media platform, for other people to see.
- Use an online music player, such as Spotify, to make play lists of your loved one's favourite music, and share it with your friends.
- Make a memory box, containing things that remind you of your loved one, and you could share with other members of your family.
- Join an online tribute website, where you can put a star in a digital sky, or a flower in a digital garden.
- If you have a garden, make an area where you can remember the person who has died. For example, a place where you can sit, or where you can plant things, or where you could put an object such as a sculpture.
- Choose a small memento, such as an item of jewellery, that reminds you of your loved one and wear it or keep it close to you.
- Create a piece of art or craft to express how you are feeling or remind you of your loved one. This could be a painting, a drawing, or something you make, for example out of clay or something you sew or knit. Some people write poetry, songs, create music or even a dance.
- Start a gratitude journal. Every day, for a length of time, you can write down positive memories about your loved one's life, or their personality, that you are grateful for.

Donate to a charity

Many people want to make a donation in their loved one's name to their favourite charity, or to a charity working to prevent your loved one's cause of death. You can tell friends and families where they can make donations too.



Organisations that provide support following bereavement

Bereavement: A self help guide

Funded by Western Bay Health and Social Care Programme

A library of self-help leaflets aimed to help you feel better informed about your emotional health and well-being.

Available from Occupational Health, NPTCC.



Bereavement Advice Centre

<https://www.bereavementadvice.org/>

Offers a free helpline for people who are bereaved and for professionals. It also has information on its website about practical matters and coping with grief. Phone: 0800 634 9494

Care for the Family

<http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/>

Care for the Family offers a variety of resources to those who are bereaved. The charity also runs events, support days and weekends away for different age groups.

Phone: 029 2081 0800

Email: mail@cff.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK

<http://childbereavementuk.org/>

Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. The organisation aims to provide families with the support they need to rebuild their lives.

Phone: 01494 568900

Email: support@childbereavementuk.org

Cruse Bereavement UK

<http://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Cruse Bereavement Care is the leading national charity for bereaved people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The charity offers support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies, and works to enhance society's care of bereaved people. Cruse offers face-to-face, telephone, email and website support.

Phone: 020 8939 9530 (Office)/0808 808 1677 (Helpline)

Email: info@cruse.org.uk

Grief Encounter

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

Grief Encounter offers personal support and a variety of resources to those bereaved. The organisation also provides training, professional support and resources for schools.

Phone: 020 8371 8455

Email: contact@griefencounter.org.uk



Hope Again

<http://hopeagain.org.uk/>

Hope Again is a website provided for young people by Cruse Bereavement Care. The website provides an opportunity for young people to share stories and experiences, a gallery and also advice for young people who have been recently bereaved.

Phone: 0808 808 1677

Email: hopeagain@cruse.org.uk

Samaritans

<http://www.samaritans.org/>

The Samaritans are there for people need them, at any time of day or night. The organisation reach 228,370 people a year in schools, hospitals and the homeless.

Phone: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Sudden

<http://www.suddendeath.org/>

Sudden is a global charitable initiative for suddenly bereaved people, and the people caring for them, including their families and professionals. This website cares for people who are suddenly bereaved.

Winston's Wish

<https://www.winstonswish.org>

Every day, more than 100 children are bereaved of a parent in the UK. Winston's Wish was established in 1992 as the UK's first child bereavement charity, and currently supports around 30,000 children and young people per year.

Phone: 08088 020 021

Email: info@winstonswish.org