St Luke's
Hospice Plymouth



# Your guide to **grief**

This leaflet offers information about grief and bereavement to help support you and remind you that you are not alone. Everyone experiences grief differently, and this guide is here to support you on your own unique journey.

## Everyone grieves differently

There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and there is no set time limit. Grief is as individual as your relationship with the person who has died. Some people feel very close to the person they have lost, while others may have had a more complicated relationship. Past experiences of loss, relationships, and your current life circumstances can also influence how you grieve. It is common for people within the same family to grieve very differently, which can be challenging to navigate.

Grief is a natural response to loss, but it can feel overwhelming. Most people find ways to live with their grief, even when it feels unbearable.

## Common experiences in grief

### Emotions you might feel

You may experience many feelings such as shock, numbness, denial, anger, sadness, guilt, regret, depression, anxiety, fear, loneliness and relief. Some feelings may surprise you with their intensity. Try to take things one day at a time and be kind to yourself. Not experiencing certain emotions doesn't mean you're not grieving or not grieving in the 'right way.'

### Sleep changes

You might sleep more or have difficulty sleeping. Simple routines like relaxing baths, avoiding caffeine, or exercise can help. If sleep problems worry you, look up sleep hygiene on the NHS website and speak to your GP.

### Appetite changes

Grief can affect your appetite in different ways. Try to eat at least one nutritious meal a day. Taking care of your body helps your overall well-being.

### Difficulty concentrating

"Brain fog", trouble focusing and forgetfulness are common. Write things down, ask for help, and be patient with yourself.

## Physical health

Grief can cause aches, headaches, or stomach issues and may weaken your immune system. Always seek medical advice if you are concerned.

## Anxiety and panic

Feeling anxious or scared about changes is normal. Relaxation, mindfulness techniques and talking can help, but contact your GP if anxiety feels overwhelming.

## Impact on relationships

For some people, loss can put a strain on your relationships. You may feel you have a lot of support early on but this may lessen over time. You might feel that your social network has changed or disappeared. You may feel you have no space to grieve due to your commitments or your role in the family. Talking to someone outside your circle might help.

## Understanding grief



**People tend to believe that grief shrinks over time**



**What really happens is that we grow around our grief**

You might expect your grief to become smaller over time, but for many people this is not the case. Instead, grief often stays the same size. As time passes and new experiences are added, you may find that your world grows around your grief. The grief remains meaningful, but it may feel less painful and easier to carry with you.

You can imagine your grief as being inside a jar. At first, the jar is completely full, and grief can feel as though it fills every part of your life. Over time, the grief stays the same size, but the jar grows larger as your life expands with new experiences.

## How grief works

Grief is often not a straight path. You may find yourself moving between:

- Loss focus: Remembering, feeling sadness, and processing your feelings about the person who died.
- Restoration focus: Managing everyday tasks and adjusting to life's changes, trying to find new meaning.

Both are important, and it's okay to switch between them as needed. It is important to feel your emotions, but you don't have to be in loss focus all the time. It is okay to distract yourself for example by watching TV or going out with friends, this doesn't mean you are going to forget your person. You are resting your brain and helping it to grieve and process.

## Continuing bonds

It's natural and healthy to keep a connection with the person who has died. You might find comfort in talking to them, keeping their belongings, wearing their clothes or perfume, visiting special places or writing a letter to them. Find what works best for you.

## Taking care of yourself

Being kind to yourself is vital. Try to include small acts of self-care and self-compassion every day, such as:

- Watching a favourite film
- Listening to music
- Eating nourishing food
- Talking to a friend
- Expressing yourself creatively
- Mindfulness and meditation
- Spending time in nature
- Taking a bath or shower
- Giving yourself permission to rest
- Journaling
- Allowing yourself to cry



## St Luke's Patient and Family Support Team

**Phone:** 01752 964200
**Email:** community@stlukes-hospice.org.uk

### Support is important

You may find it difficult to ask for support, but most people find connection with others helps. This might be talking to friends and family, finding an in-person support group or accessing bereavement support online. There are many self-help and virtual bereavement resources available online. Please see our useful links directory (add link) for suggestions on where you might begin.

Others prefer to speak to someone directly. The St Luke's Adult Bereavement Service is free of charge and open to anyone living in Plymouth and Devon whose relative or friend was cared for by St Luke's. We understand that some people may not feel ready to ask for support straight away - and that's okay. You can contact us at any time, whether your loss was recent or happened some time ago.

## When grief becomes more difficult

Most grief is not a mental health problem. It takes time to adjust and heal, and some days may be harder than others. There is no set time to grieve, and it will be different for everyone. You might feel that grief comes in waves. However, you may want to seek professional help if:

- Intense grief lasts a long time and worsens.
- Grief strongly affects your daily life.
- You have existing mental health issues that worsen.

If you are worried about your mental health, contact your GP. For immediate crisis support, call 111 (option 2) or reach out to helplines such as the Samaritans (116 123).

## Useful contacts

### Cruse

It is a voluntary organisation that specialises in support for people who are bereaved. Cruse can help with support, counselling, education, advice and information. Counsellors are available by phone or email. You can call free on 0808 808 1677 or visit cruse.org.uk.

### Marie Curie

For information and advice on all aspects of end of life and bereavement. Marie Curie offers a telephone bereavement service for people grieving after someone has died from a palliative illness. Call 0800 090 2309 or visit mariecurie.org.uk.

### Sue Ryder

For information, advice and bereavement support. Offers an online community to talk to others who are grieving, a video chat counselling service and personalised grief support by text message. Visit sueryder.org for more information.

### The Good Grief Trust

For support and information in your grief - thegoodgrieftrust.org.

**AtaLoss**
Provides a central signposting and information service for everyone bereaved. They also offer a free live chat with a bereavement counsellor through their service Grief Chat at ataloss.org.

**Bereavement Advice Centre**

There are many practical matters to attend to when someone dies. Bereavement Advice Centre supports and advises people on what they need to do after a death at bereavementadvice.org.

**The Bereavement Journey**

For anyone who has been bereaved at any time and in any way. As a series of films and discussion groups, the course gently guides bereaved people through the most common aspects of grief. Usually run by churches, the course uniquely offers a final session on faith questions in bereavement provided from a Christian perspective. This is optional, thus making The Bereavement Journey suitable for people of any faith or none, availalble at thebereavementjourney.org.

**Mind - Mental Health Support**

Call 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday | Helpline: 0300 102 1234 | Website: mind.org.uk

Find a private therapist

**NCPS**

ncps.com/counselling-directory

**BACP**

bacp.org.uk

**Samaritans**

Emotional Support to Anyone in Distress 24/7. Helpline: 116 123, website: samaritans.org.

**NHS - Mental Health Support**

Call 111 and select option 2 to speak to the NHS Mental Health Crisis Response Service 24/7, or search Mental health - NHS



# St Luke's Hospice Plymouth

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