BEREAVEMENT: HELP AND SUPPORT DURING YOUR GRIEF

ST CHRISTOPHER'S

IS IT NORMAL TO FEEL THIS WAY?

When someone who is important to us dies it can feel unbearable, as though our whole world has changed. As unique individuals, our response to loss is also likely to be unique, and can be affected by the relationship we had with the person who died. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

WAYS TO THINK ABOUT GRIEF

"In some ways the pain of grief itself stayed much the same ... but as time went on my world expanded so it felt less suffocating"
Dr Lois Tonkin (2006)

Dr Lois Tonkin, who writes about loss and grief, suggests a helpful way that we can think about grief:

1. At first it can feel as if grief has filled your entire life
2. As the weeks and months go by, something important happens. The grief may stay the same, but your life starts to grow around it. You will have new experiences and begin to find moments of enjoyment
3. Eventually your life will grow around the grief. It will always be there, and it may grow bigger at difficult times, but it will not dominate your life.

SOME REACTIONS TO GRIEF

EMOTIONS

"I can't stop crying and I feel really angry"
Grief can have a powerful effect on how we feel. Sadness is a natural response to grief, although not exclusively expressed through tearfulness. We may be surprised or shocked by some of the feelings we are experiencing or we might not be able to feel anything at all. Some may find it easier or harder than others to express and cope with the emotions they are experiencing. This range of responses to loss is normal.

SLEEPING

"I can't sleep and I'm exhausted"
Grieving can be exhausting. Some people notice they are sleeping more than usual, while others have restless sleep, interrupted by dreams, or they might wake up during the night and can't get back to sleep. For others sleep continues as usual. Many sleep hygiene tips are widely accessible online including mindfulness and sleep apps. Keeping a bedtime routine, having a relaxing bath, exercising or avoiding caffeine, amongst other things, may help.

EATING

"I'm not interested in food" or **"I can't stop eating"**
We may feel we can't be bothered to cook or we don't feel hungry. Alternatively, we may be comfort eating or drinking more than usual. Try to eat at least one healthy meal a day. It is important to look after ourselves as best we can as this is likely to have a positive effect on our overall wellbeing.

CONCENTRATION

"There's so much to do but I can't put my mind to it"
Grieving can affect every part of us; mind body and spirit. It might be hard to concentrate, maybe your thoughts are confused or you just don't know where to start. It's important to be gentle and compassionate and not expect too much of yourself.

HEALTH

"I don't feel so good, both physically and in myself"
It is not uncommon to experience physical and/or mental health symptoms and it is important not to neglect your health. Your GP can talk you through some options which might help. Physical exercise like a walk, going to the gym or gardening can be beneficial to wellbeing.

ANXIETY

"There's a knot in my stomach"
When things happen that are out of our control we can sometimes feel anxious or worried. Looking at ways we have coped with stress and loss in the past can often help us manage some of the things we are experiencing at present. There are many different techniques and activities which can help alleviate symptoms of anxiety and different people will find things which work for them.

WILL I EVER FEEL THE SAME AGAIN?

"I thought I was coping but now I'm going backwards"
When someone close to us dies, we know that life has changed and will never be exactly the same as before, but over time there will be an adjustment to this different life which will gradually become the new normal. Grief has its own pace so it will be different for each one of us. Bereavement is rarely experienced in a straight line so it's natural that some days our bereavement will be more or less bearable than other days. It can often be affected by remembering through seasonal changes.

FAMILY AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

"I don't want to burden my family and friends"

We often hear that family and friends have been great but they have busy lives or they are bereaved too. We might not feel able to talk about how we really feel or we might have different ways of expressing grief and communicating than other family members. It can be helpful to find someone you know who is patient, kind and will listen to what you want to say about how you are feeling. Talking is part of the healing process. Some may find comfort in their faith and spirituality.

PRACTICALITIES

"Where do I start?"

It can seem like there is so much to do with new tasks to learn. Some people find it helpful to make a list of family/friends who could give practical help or advice, or to accept support already offered. Tackle things at your own pace and in your own time according to what works for you.

ARE THERE THINGS I CAN DO THAT HELP?

- It's OK to have time off from your grief. Give yourself a welcome distraction if you feel able, like a cup of coffee with a friend or watching a film
- Being outdoors around nature is often beneficial for your mental wellbeing
- Find a healthy outlet to express your grief – through exercise, talking, journalling or painting
- Let others know what support or help you need.

HERE TO HELP YOU

BEREAVEMENT HELP POINTS

Assisting people in our communities seeking support following bereavement.
stchristophers.org.uk/bereavement-help-points

ST CHRISTOPHER'S BEREAVEMENT TEAM

Telephone 020 8768 4599
Email info@stchristophers.org.uk
stchristophers.org.uk

CANDLE CHILD BEREAVEMENT SERVICE

Telephone 020 8768 4533
Email info@stchristophers.org.uk
stchristophers.org.uk

ANXIETY UK

A charity offering support with anxiety.
anxietyuk.org.uk

BEREAVEMENT ADVICE CENTRE

Practical information and advice soon after a death.
Telephone 0800 634 9494 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)
bereavementadvice.org

CALM (CAMPAIGN AGAINST LIVING MISERABLY)

Telephone 0808 802 5858 (daily, 5pm-12am)
thecalmzone.net

GRIEFCHAT

A free online space to text and talk.
griefchat.co.uk (Mon-Fri, 9am-9pm)

THE LOSS FOUNDATION

Offering virtual support groups for those who have lost a loved one to cancer.
thelossfoundation.org

SAMARITANS

A free 24/7 safe place to talk, for those in crisis.
Telephone 116 123
Email jo@samaritans.org
www.samaritans.org

SHOUT

A 24/7 UK text service for people in crisis.
Text **85258**

SILVERLINE

A helpline for anyone over 55 years of age
Telephone **0800 4 70 80 90** (daily, 24 hours)
thesilverline.org.uk

SUE RYDER

Information, grief guidance and online bereavement support
Telephone **0808 164 4572**
Email **supportercare@sueryder.org**
online.counselling@suerydercare.org
sueryder.org

PRIVATE COUNSELLORS

A listing of private counsellors can be found at:

Counselling Directory
counselling-directory.org.uk

BACP Find a Therapist
bacp.co.uk

VIDEO RESOURCES

A channel for guided mindfulness and meditation
youtube.com/user/getsomeheadspace

A TedTalk by Dr Susan Delaney about different grieving styles
youtube.com/watch?v=F_HVeL99eK4

OTHER RESOURCES

Suggested reading: *The Plain Guide to Grief* by John Wilson – a book supporting people through grief

SLaM: a 24-hour Mental Health Crisis Line, part of the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust.
Telephone **0800 731 2864**

If you would like this information in a different format, such as audio tape, braille or large print, or in another language, please speak to the Communications team on **020 8768 4500** or email **communications@stchristophers.org.uk**.

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Sydenham site
51-59 Lawrie Park Road,
Sydenham, London SE26 6DZ

Orpington site
Caritas House, Tregony Road,
Orpington BR6 9XA

Telephone **020 8768 4500**
Email **info@stchristophers.org.uk**
stchrishospice
stchristophers.org.uk

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