



Coping with Crisis

When someone we know dies

Understanding your feelings - for older children

When someone we care about dies we all feel grief. People grieve for different lengths of time, and as we grieve we can experience different feelings or emotions, some examples of which are given below.

They may not necessarily happen in the order given.

Feelings we may have when someone dies:

Shock and disbelief

An initial reaction to a death may be shock and disbelief. The person may feel numb and/or go through the day automatically. They may go very quiet and not want to speak to anyone, or they may have times when they feel anxious and in a panic. This period of shock can last from a few hours to a week or more.

Denial

The person may behave as if nothing has happened and as if the dead person were still around. For example, they may lay a place at the table for them or try to ring them up and invite them out. They might dream that the dead person is still alive and has not really died.

Growing awareness

The person gradually realises what it means to them to have lost someone they care about. This growing awareness can sometimes trigger a number of emotions.

The person may feel they need to find a reason for the death. They may want to go over and over how the person died or to visit the place where it happened.

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The person may feel angry and want to blame someone, for example a doctor or someone else involved if there was an accident. Sometimes the person may be furious with whoever has died because they have left them.

The grieving person may feel sad and depressed. They may feel as if nothing matters or they may become anxious. They may feel actual pain or very empty inside. They may cry often, even when there is no obvious reason for them to be reminded of the person who has died.

Sometimes the grieving person may feel guilty, even if there is no good reason. For example, they may feel terrible because the last time they talked to the person who has died they had an argument. If there has been an accident, they may feel that this was somehow their fault and go through a string of 'if only', for example, 'if only I had been there...' or 'if only I hadn't shouted...'

Sometimes the grieving person may not know quite what they are feeling but develop symptoms or behave in unusual ways. For example, they may be more likely to become ill, find it difficult to get to sleep, start biting their nails etc.

They may either eat far more than usual or lose interest in eating. They may not want to go to school and, if they do, they may find it difficult to concentrate. They may find it hard to finish their work or homework or to remember what they are supposed to be doing. They may not be able to think clearly all the time.

Some people worry that they might become ill or die. If they are happy or enjoying things they may think that it is wrong to feel that way.

It is OK for the grieving person to have happy thoughts and express humour even when someone they know has recently died. It is OK for the grieving person to meet up with their friends and go out if they wish. They will have a mixture of happy times and sad times during this period.

Acceptance

Eventually the grieving person will be able to get on with life as before. They will, of course, continue to remember the person who has died but this will not affect them in quite the same way.

If this is happening to you

- Talk about how you feel to someone else. This could be to a friend, a teacher or someone in your family. You may want them to help you find someone else to talk to, for example a school counsellor or trusted adult.
- Write or draw a picture to show how you feel.
- Tell a teacher if you cannot concentrate or are having difficulty with your work, homework or feelings.

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How to help a friend who is grieving

- Try to be as natural as possible but do not pretend that nothing has happened.
- Just being with someone can help.
- Someone who is grieving may suddenly burst into tears, try to accept this. If you feel like crying too that is all right.
- Do not worry if the person just wants to be alone, as long as an adult is aware of this and checks on them.
- It can be important to remember the person who has died and to create special reminders. For example, it may be a good idea to collect together some photographs, make a book, write about the person or make a special memory box.

The grieving process can take some time. You can help just by listening and being with your friend.