



## Bereavement and Grieving

The experience of bereavement due to coronavirus may be complicated as friends or relative may have died in an unexpected or traumatic way and people may be cut off from their usual support networks.

### Common Responses:

It is important to remember that we can have a huge variety of responses following the death of someone we care about. These are some of the emotional experiences you may notice:

**Shock/numbness:** It may take some time for you to grasp what has happened, particularly if you were unable to see your loved one or be with them when they died. This shock can leave you feeling numb and some people carry on as if nothing has happened. It can be hard to believe that someone important in your life is not coming back and you may feel disorientated, like you are living in a different world or no longer belong.

**Pain/sadness:** Feelings of sadness or pain can be overwhelming, and some people may find the intensity of these feelings frightening.

**Longing:** The death of a loved, particularly when unexpected or sudden, can leave us feeling a desperate sense of longing to see or be with the person again. You may find that you can't stop thinking about the death or the events leading up to it. It is also common to think you are hearing or seeing the person who has died. These experiences can happen as the brain tries to process the death and acknowledge the finality of it. Sometimes when a death has been traumatic people can experience frightening and intrusive memories or nightmares. These often feel like we are back in that traumatic time and although horrible to experience are a normal part of our brain trying to process this distressing experience. These usually reduce over time, but if you find they don't or they are making you very anxious please contact your GP who will be able to find you appropriate support or speak to a trained volunteer at Cruse Bereavement Care (see Other Resources p3).



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**Anger:** You may feel angry. This is a completely natural emotion in response to the death of someone we care about. It may feel unfair, especially when deaths due to coronavirus mean people are dying unexpectedly and in circumstances we wouldn't want them to have died in. You may feel angry and helpless that this has happened, and anger may be directed in different directions:

- You may feel angry at the hospital staff, feeling that your loved one did not receive the care they should have, especially as health services are so stretched.
- You may feel angry at the government for not being more prepared for the coronavirus or not putting stronger controls in place.
- You may feel angry towards the person who died for not taking greater care or protective measures.
- You may also feel angry towards yourself for things you did or did not say or do before the person's death.

**Guilt:** It is common for people to feel directly or indirectly to blame for the death of a loved one, even when it is clear objectively that they weren't to blame. The situation with coronavirus may make you feel this more intensely, feeling that you didn't do enough to help or protect the person.

**Depression:** It can often feel like life lacks meaning following the death of someone close, and sometimes people may feel like they want to die too. This is a common experience and these feelings may come and go. However, if it feels as though these feelings are overwhelming or always around it is important to get support. You can speak to your GP or the Samaritans (see Other Resources p3).

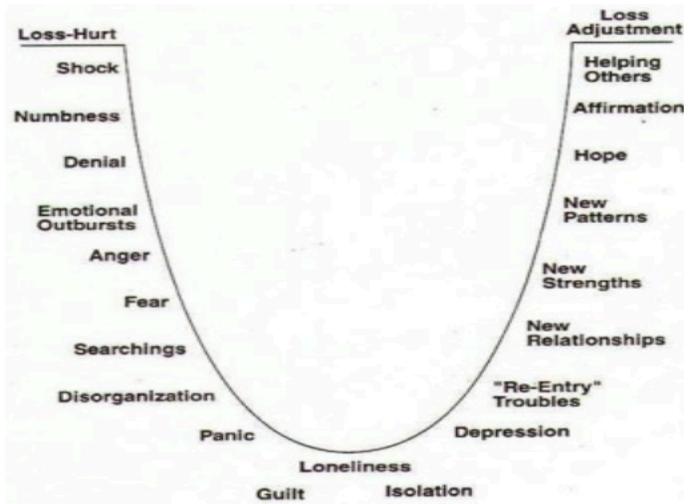
These feelings can be exhausting, and we may find we try to fight them as they are uncomfortable and difficult to sit with. However, it is often less tiring and easier to cope if we can acknowledge our pain and loss and accept that we may experience many different and unexpected emotions.



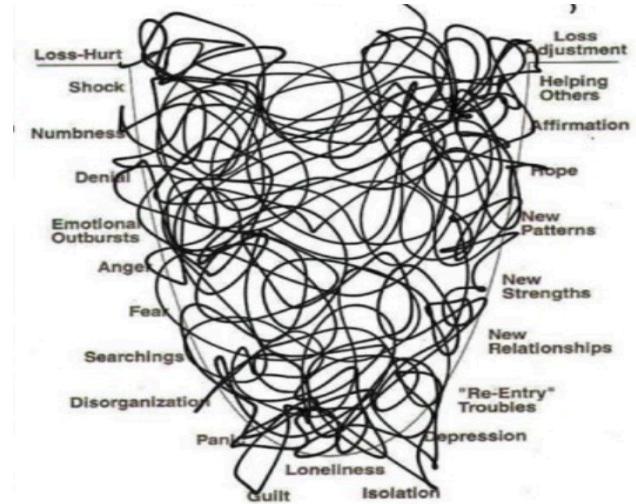
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## The Grieving Process:

One common idea of how we respond to bereavement is the Stages of Grief. This suggests that we move through a linear set of experiences, like this below



However, many people report that their experience of grief is much more similar this image below



## What can help?

It may be helpful to know that everyone's grieving process is unique to them (hence the feeling of the confusing squiggly mess above). Even though your experience of loss and process of grieving may be unique there are things we know that can help you cope at this difficult time:

1. **Emotional support:** The experience of bereavement can be one of the loneliest experiences you can go through and feelings may be made more intense by the current social distancing measures. Although you may not physically be able to be with close friends or family, talking to or messaging them can be one of the most helpful ways of coping with grief. At times you may want to talk to remember your loved one together, at other times you may just want light-hearted distraction. Sometimes people may not respond in a way you find helpful – others can feel helpless as they know they can't fix your grief. It can be helpful for you to tell them what you need at this time.



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2. **Self-care:** When we are grieving it can be hard to think about looking after ourselves. Emotions may get in the way of our ability to self-care, or we may feel bad that we are looking after ourselves or don't feel so overwhelmed by grief. Even when we feel overwhelmed by grief it is important to try and look after ourselves by making sure we eat, rest and get some fresh air. It can help, even just a little, to keep to a regular routine of getting up and dressed, eating meals and going to bed at the usual time.
3. **Remembering:** Your relationship with your loved one continues after they have died. Re-finding and remembering this relationship can help to keep it alive:
  - When are the times you notice a connection with your loved one?
  - When is it strongest?
  - Where can you find/seek out a connection with your loved one?

Other physical ways of remembering your loved one may be to:

  - Make a book of memories and photos
  - Keep a collection of some special possessions
  - Do something that commemorates them, e.g. planting a tree, donating to charity
4. **Practical support:** There can be a lot to do after someone dies. It can feel overwhelming and add to the emotional impact of the loss. Prioritise tasks and leave those that do not require immediate attention. Ask friends and family to help with some tasks, or maybe ask them to take on other day-to-day tasks while you focus on those relating to the bereavement. See Other Resources for further advice.

## Key Points:

1. It can be helpful to acknowledge your pain and loss
2. Try to accept that grief can trigger many different and unexpected emotions
3. Understand that your grieving process will be unique to you
4. Seek out support from people who care about you



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## Other Resources:

### Cruse:

Offer advice, support and information to those who are bereaved. They have resources that relate specifically to bereavement due to coronavirus.

Website: <https://www.cruse.org.uk>

Helpline: 0808 808 1677 (*open Mon & Fri 9:30am-5:30pm, Tues-Thurs 9:30am-8pm, excluding Bank Holidays*)

Staffed by trained bereavement volunteers, who offer emotional support to anyone affected by bereavement

### The Loss Foundation:

Provide information and support to those bereaved by coronavirus or cancer. Are now providing a free online support group for those bereaved by coronavirus

Website: <https://thelossfoundation.org>

Advice on practical support following bereavement:

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/about-grief/what-to-do-after-someone-dies>

### Samaritans:

Provide confidential support to those who are distressed or struggling to cope

Helpline: 116 123 (*open 24hrs a day, 365 days a year*)

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Website: <https://www.samaritans.org>