

A scenic landscape featuring a calm lake in the foreground, a tree on the left, and mountains in the background under a sky with purple and blue hues. The text is overlaid on this background.

# Living

**Finding comfort, strength and hope**

# Through

**at a time of bereavement**

# Grief



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*‘No one told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid.*

*The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep swallowing.*

*At other times it feels like mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sense of an invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says.’*

C S LEWIS, A GRIEF OBSERVED

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# The grief journey

Loss and grief are a part of human life. Grief is a universal human response. The loss can be very painful, difficult and stressful.

- **Bereavement** is what happens to you
- **grief** is what you feel
- **mourning** is what we do in order to come to terms with our loss

Facing the loss of a loved one can be devastating for many people. Grief is a normal response to the loss of a loved one. Grief is a very unique experience for each individual.

However there are some common experiences that bereaved people encounter as they journey from grief to restoration.

The heart ache of loss can be felt really deeply. Grief comes in waves and we can find ourselves feeling out

of control with our emotions all over the place. For instance one minute we are sad and crying and the next minute laughing; one time feeling angry and the next feeling OK. This is a common reaction and slowly these waves of intense emotions lessen

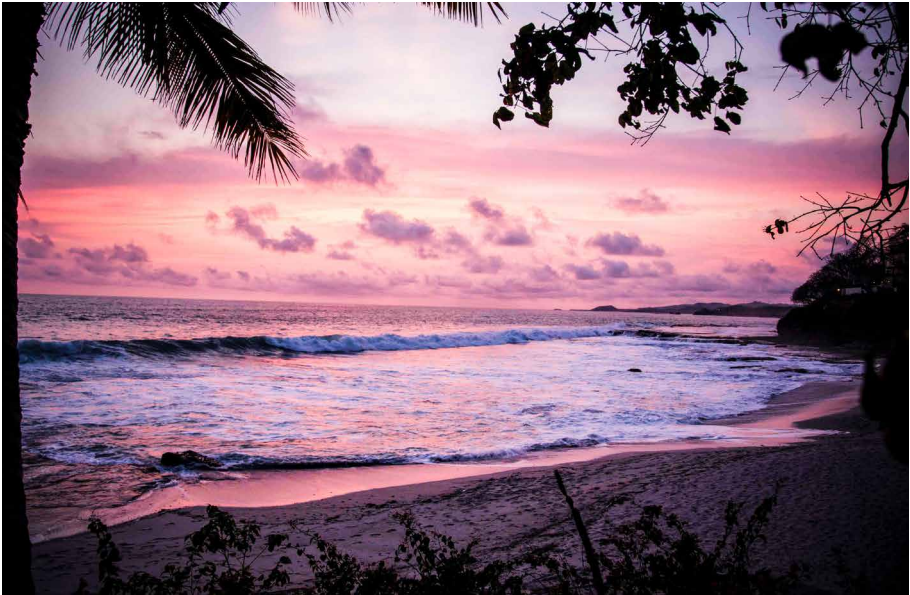
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*‘Grief is the price  
we pay for love.’*

QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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over time. Although we tend to focus on the emotional response to loss, it also has a mental, behavioural, physical, social and spiritual dimension. This booklet will explore some of the ways we experience grief.



# The emotions we may experience

Being open and willing to feel the painful feelings of loss, such as grief, sorrow or hurt, may not be something we find easy to do, but it is essential to recognise our emotions if we are to move through the grieving journey. These are some common feelings people have.

## **I feel numb and frozen**

The shock of losing a loved one can leave us feeling overwhelmed, causing difficulties in functioning as

normal and doing simple tasks and remembering things. Feeling numb is very natural at first because it doesn't rush us into the grieving process before we are ready, thus helping us to process what has happened at a pace that we can manage. Some of us may find we carry on with life as if nothing has happened which can be a way of managing the pain providing that it does not prevent us from recognising that a major loss has

occurred. It is important that we face up to our grief and feel the painful reality of the loss and our response to it. The pain will not go away if we ignore it.

### **I feel angry**

With any loss, anger may not be far away. We may find ourselves feeling angry or frustrated – life is unfair - and blame something or someone for our loss, so that we can try and make sense of it. We may feel angry with ourselves, others involved, doctors, or God. We may even feel angry with the person for dying and leaving us to cope with the demands of life. Anger is a common response to feeling out of control, powerless and possibly feeling abandoned by our loved one.

### **I feel guilty**

We may feel we have let our loved one down and that somehow we could have prevented their death. (Self-blame). On the other hand we may feel relieved when the person who has died is released from their suffering. Relief is an understandable response in these circumstances and does not deny the fact that we loved the person. We may also feel full of regrets and these emotions can cause us a lot of pain.

### **I feel fearful and anxious**

Being plunged into grief we may feel anxious, afraid and worry about what may happen in the future as we face uncertainty, especially if this means being alone. A few of us may suffer panic attacks. Feeling anxious about our own or another's mortality is not unusual.

### **I feel sad**

Overwhelming sadness is the most common response to grief and this emotion is expressed with many tears – that is why it is important to let our tears flow freely to cry out the pain. Jesus himself wept at the graveside of His friend.

### **I feel low and depressed**

Hopelessness and despair are frequently felt emotions and sometimes accompany a deep-seated sense of loneliness.

### **Other emotions**

We may also experience other feelings such as emptiness, meaninglessness and longing.

*Following the loss of a dearly loved person, there is no right or wrong way to feel at any given moment. It is OK not to feel OK!*

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*'Give sorrow words; the  
grief that does not speak  
knits up the o-er wrought  
heart and bids it break.'*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, MACBETH

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# Thoughts we may have

## **I can't believe it**

Some of us may find it very difficult in the early days to take in the reality of losing a loved one.

## **If only...**

We try and make sense of our loss by speculating how different it could have been. e.g. 'If only they had gone to the doctor sooner...'

## **I must be strong and not cry**

Crying does not mean we are weak. It is a common response to sadness. However, some of us may still feel the pain as deeply as others, without shedding tears, and may have other ways of expressing our feelings.

## **Am I going mad? I keep hearing their voice and occasionally think I see them**

It may take some time for our brains to catch up with what has happened – it's as if our mind cannot take in that our loved one has died. Don't

worry. It is not unusual to see or hear the person and we can find ourselves talking to them. This is perfectly normal during the first months.

## **I can't turn off my thoughts and keep on thinking about what has happened**

This again is the mind's way of dealing with the shock of losing someone, particular if their death was sudden. Some of us may find this overwhelming which causes intense anxiety. Racing worrying thoughts in the early days is normal.

## **What about my own death?**

It's not unusual to think of our own death and the need to put our affairs in order. For some there is also concern and worry for our dependents and family when we die. Those with religious faith will draw on the resources of that faith.  
(See page 10)

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*‘Without you in my arms,  
I feel an emptiness in my soul.  
I find myself searching the  
crowds for your face.  
I know it’s an impossibility; but  
I cannot help myself.’*

NICHOLAS SPARKS, MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

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# Some of the other ways we may behave

## **We may take refuge in a lot of activity**

During the early days we may want to keep going as we try and respond to the immediate practical needs to be arranged. We may even feel agitated and can't sit still for long. Some of us want to keep talking about our loved ones, as this may help us to come to terms with the loss. However be aware that activity can be a way of denying the reality of the loss and a protection against the pain.

## **We may want to withdraw**

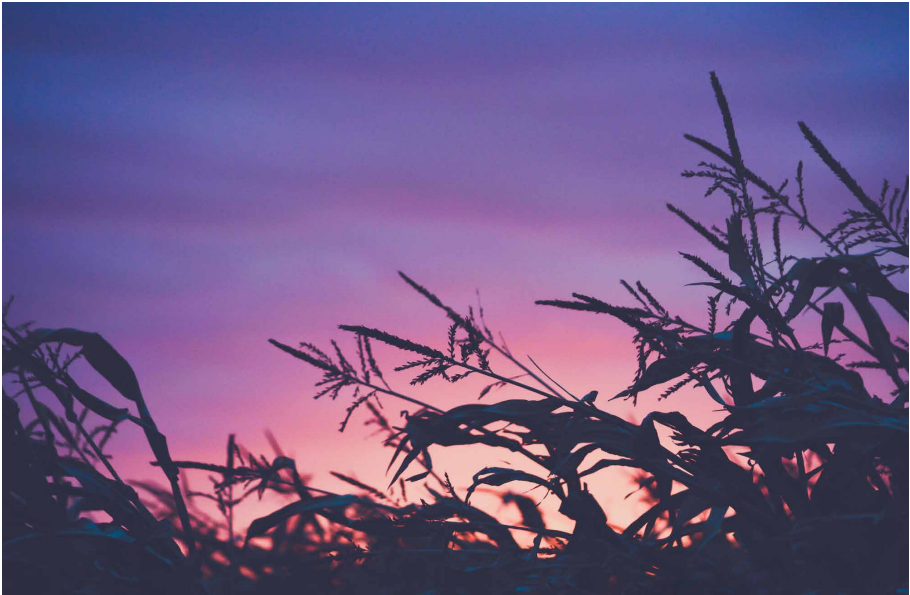
The pain of grief may cause us to withdraw and isolate ourselves from others which gives us space to reflect on our loss. However, retreating into our shell and isolating ourselves for too long from others is not healthy. Having face-to-face support is important for our healing process even if we don't feel like sharing our thoughts and feelings. Just being with friends and family who care about us is comforting.

*We need to remind ourselves: there is no right or wrong way to respond.*

# Physical symptoms

We are created as a whole person. Our emotions and thoughts are connected to our bodies. Therefore it is normal to experience shock, pain and sadness in our bodies as well. We may experience any or all of these symptoms.

- Insomnia
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Lowered resistance to illness
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Headaches



# Grief and our spiritual life

For some, our grief may draw us closer to God and our faith grows. Whereas for others, some may question their faith and feel abandoned by God. Commonly asked questions are:

- Where are you God?
- Have you forgotten me?
- If you are a loving God why did this happen?

We cannot prepare fully for the death of a loved one. Death is so deeply emotional and seems final, shaking

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*‘He heals the  
brokenhearted  
and binds up  
their wounds.’*

**PSALM 147:3**

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us to the core. We read in the Bible that God's son, Jesus wept when he heard that his friend Lazarus had died, so we can take comfort in that Jesus understands our pain. (Jn 11:35) He weeps with us! What a comforting thought that only He knows how we fully feel about our loved ones. Nevertheless it is natural to ask ourselves. 'Where is a loving God in the death of my loved one?' When we are grieving it is tempting to think that if we could find answers to the questions that torment us, somehow our grief would lessen. The problem is that these sorts of questions are indeed very difficult. They are mysteries which God holds in His mind.

'His understanding no-one can fathom' (Isaiah 40:28). Lasting comfort is found in who we know, rather than in what we know. Real comfort comes when we rest in our relationship with the most loving, most gracious, most forgiving, and most powerful Person in the universe.

Jesus is our hope because He brings us peace in the midst of our turmoil; courage and strength instead of fear; confidence in the face of doubt. Above all, after dying on the cross His resurrection gives us the confident expectation of a better life to come

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*'The Lord is close  
to the broken-  
hearted and saves  
those who are  
crushed in spirit'*

**PSALM 34:7**

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when he says death is not the end of life, but the beginning of eternity - living with God in heaven. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though they die". (Jn 11:25) This gives us hope.

So although from a human point of view death may seem final and an enemy, for Christians death takes us to the place where, 'God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' (Rev 21:4)

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*‘The reality is that you will  
grieve forever.*

*You will not “get over” the  
loss of a loved one; you will  
learn to live with it.*

*You will heal and you will  
rebuild yourself around the  
loss you have suffered.*

*You will be whole again but  
you will never be the same.*

*Nor should you be the same  
nor would you want to.’*

ELIZABETH KUBLER-ROSS  
AND DAVID KESSLER

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# How to care for ourselves

When we're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of ourselves and give ourselves time and permission to grieve. Unless attended to, the stress of the loss of a dear loved one can seriously deplete our energy and emotional reserves. Looking after our physical and emotional needs will help us journey through this most difficult time.

## **Acknowledge our feelings**

Becoming aware of our emotions is the first important step forward along our journey towards good emotional and mental health as we emerge from the season of pain. It's important we face up to our pain in order to find healing. Ignoring or suppressing our grief will only prolong the grieving process. Unresolved grief can lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, health problems, and substance abuse.

Our own grief is individual, but it can be a help to share with those who are travelling the same road. But no one else can tell us it's time to 'move on' or 'you should have got over it by now.' It's important to give ourselves

permission to feel whatever, without embarrassment or judgement.

## **Express our feelings creatively**

Consider some of these creative ways: writing a journal expressing how you feel; write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; put together a memory box; plant a rose, shrub or tree in the garden which may remind us of the living memories we have of our loved one.

## **Try to maintain a routine**

This may be difficult in the early days particularly if having sleepless nights. The important thing is to be kind and gentle with ourselves. There's comfort in routine and when ready, return to the activities that bring us joy.

## **Make lists**

Don't try and hold 'things to do' in our heads because this can be exhausting and we may experience a degree of forgetfulness in the early days. So writing things down can be a helpful reminder.

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*God will never abandon us  
during our times of grief—he  
will always provide us with  
love and hope.*

*‘He will wipe away every tear  
from their eyes, and death shall  
be no more, neither shall there  
be mourning, nor crying, nor  
pain anymore, for the former  
things have passed away.’*

REVELATION 21:4

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### **Plan ahead for grief ‘triggers’ like anniversaries**

Anniversaries, birthdays, Christmas, holidays, important dates and milestones can reawaken difficult memories and feelings.

It may be helpful for some of us to lay some flowers at the graveside or crematorium. It’s completely normal to experience another emotional wave of grief at these times. Talk to other relatives about their expectations and agree before the anniversary, ways you want to honour the memory of the life of our loved one. Be aware of unexpected triggers.

### **Look after our physical health**

As we have already mentioned, the mind and body are connected. If we can’t face food at first, no worries, try and eat healthy food a little and often. Try and get enough rest even if we can’t sleep, and exercise daily in the fresh air if possible. Research has shown that being out in nature is very healing. When we feel healthy physically, we are more emotionally resilient.

### **Can antidepressant medication help grief?**

Feeling sad and sorrowful with grief is very normal. With the advice of a medical professional, taking

medication may relieve some of the symptoms by numbing the pain.

However, antidepressants can delay the mourning process and medication doesn’t treat the underlying cause which is the pain of loss. This sadness and pain has to be felt and worked through for healing.

### **Accept offers of help from relatives and friends**

Grieving is a time to lean on friends who care about us, so take up their offers of support and help. It is not weak to accept their help. Quite often others don’t know how they can support us, so be brave and tell them what would help. It may be a friendly chat and perhaps someone to cry with, practical help and/or a cuppa.

### **Draw comfort from our faith**

If we have a faith and follow a religious tradition, embrace the comfort its mourning rituals can provide. Spiritual activities that are meaningful to us can offer us comfort. This may be praying, meditating or going to our place of worship. We may find ourselves questioning our faith and asking questions such as ‘where will I go when I die?’

It may be helpful to talk to a clergy/ minister or someone from our own religious community.



# How can Greyfriars and New Hope support you and help you on your journey?

We aim to run the Bereavement Journey course every six months (see page 18 for more details).

We will offer coffee mornings for those who are bereaved every two or three months.

We will offer memorial services and quiet reflective spaces in the Church buildings.

We will offer prayer support if wanted.

We will signpost to other support, i.e. counsellors, pastoral visitors etc.

For more information please contact:

**Rev David Walker**  
01189516700

**Rev Natalie Worsfold**  
01189516700

**Chris Ledger**  
office@greyfriars.org.uk

For the Bereavement Journey, contact **Lizzie White**  
bereavement@greyfriars.org.uk



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*A prayer*

*God of all comfort, I am hurting so much I am finding it hard to endure this sorrow. I don't know what to do with myself. Sometimes I feel like screaming and running away. I don't like feeling like this, but I do. Thank you Lord for loving me as I am. Help me to handle my feelings and sustain me.*

*Amen*

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# The Bereavement Journey

A SIX-SESSION COURSE HELPING YOU  
WORK THROUGH GRIEF AND LOSS

**The Bereavement Journey consists of six sessions based around videos and discussion looking at different aspects of bereavement.**

We explore the impact and pain of bereavement, adjusting to change, anger and guilt, and coping with other peoples' reactions. The sixth session is an optional look at loss from a faith perspective.

The sessions are designed to enable people to begin working through grief and to find support from others who have experienced loss. We provide a supportive, loving, non-judgemental place where those who are grieving feel they are among people who understand (we also work through a lot of tea and cake!).

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*'The Bereavement Journey course helped me articulate things I've felt or thought but not been able to say'*

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*'The course helped me realise I'm not alone in how I feel when I heard other peoples' experiences'*

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*'The course created an opportunity to share things in an empathetic, friendly and safe environment'*

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*'Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give, but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.'*



Find out more and sign up: [www.greyfriars.org.uk/courses](http://www.greyfriars.org.uk/courses)

# Further helpful information

## **CRUSE Bereavement Care**

Berkshire Bereavement Care Thames Valley Office  
01344 411919 · [crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://crusebereavementcare.org.uk) · [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk)  
Email: [Cruse.tvberks@btconnect.com](mailto:Cruse.tvberks@btconnect.com)  
Young people's helpline: 0808 8081677  
Young people's website: [www.RD4U.org.uk](http://www.RD4U.org.uk)

## **The Samaritans**

Helpline: 116 123  
[samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/](http://samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/)

## **At a Loss (signposting charity)**

[office@ataloss.org](mailto:office@ataloss.org)  
[www.ataloss.org](http://www.ataloss.org)

## **Care for the Family – Bereaved Parent Support**

[www.careforthefamily.org.uk/bps](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/bps)

## **Books**

A Journey Through Grief by Faith Hanson (ISBN 9780860718031)  
Insight into Bereavement by Wendy Bray and Diana Priest (CWR Insight Series)  
Talking About Dying by P Giddings, M Down, E Sugden, G Tuckwell (ISBN 9780995683204)

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*'The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down  
in green pastures.  
He leads me beside  
quiet waters.  
He restores my soul.*

...

*Surely goodness and love will  
follow me all the days of my  
life, and I will dwell in the  
house of the Lord for ever.'*

PSALM 23:1-3, 6

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