

## Things That May Help You on Your Journey of Grief

1. It is helpful to realise that there is no 'normal time' by which you should be feeling better. Our journey of grief is an individual thing, but almost certainly it will take longer than the few weeks usually allowed by our society.
2. Grieving involves a whole mixture of emotions. There is a very natural urge to avoid painful things, but it is important not to suppress your feelings; rather allow yourself space to feel them. Being able to express them to an understanding friend or sympathetic listener is helpful; to be heard and responded to.
3. Your journey of grief is unique to you. Some people like to have time alone; others want to be with people. Some like to tell and retell their story, others want to be silent, etc. We all journey at different speeds. Don't let well meaning friends rush you or pressure you. There is no right or wrong way. You must grieve in your way.
4. It is important to allow yourself time to grieve, but it is also important to take a break from grieving from time to time and eventually to put it aside, even though you would never put aside the memories of the one you love.
5. Many have found that when they are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, the knowledge that God is with them provides them with inner strength, even though it does not remove the pain.

### Further Help:

CRUSE – Bereavement Care [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)  
Berks & North Hants Area: Tel 0844 736 0441  
National helpline: 0844 477 9400



*Grief's Journey*

Bereavement and grief is a journey which most people experience at some time in their lives, and we react to it in different ways. It is a painful journey and may give rise to feelings or symptoms you did not expect.

It can be hard to accept the loss of a loved one. There may well be a sense of unreality and numbness. Some people find themselves trying to deny that the death has occurred. It is not unusual to think you have heard or seen the dead person. Many bereaved people feel strained and physically run down, finding it difficult to eat or sleep. You may experience headaches, odd pains and loss of concentration. Grief is a time-consuming and exhausting thing.

Some people experience despair and depression, finding that they have lost all interest in living. They may feel there is no point in going on or that no-one else could possibly experience what they are going through. The loneliness and emptiness may be intense. All these are natural reactions to bereavement and not a sign that you are “going mad” or letting down your family and friends.

Besides the grief and sadness you may also experience other emotions. Some people feel intense anxiety about the future; or there may be self-criticism, shame or guilt; self-pity and anger; a deep desire to blame someone; sometimes irritability with others, even with the dead person. If you do experience these emotions you may feel you ought to hide them, but they, too, are part of bereavement. Some people find themselves feeling hurt, perhaps convinced that some of their family or friends are avoiding them. Unfortunately, this often does happen and is probably due to their embarrassment, as they do not know what to say. It may be necessary for you to take the first step, letting them know that you would like to talk about your loved one and need their support.

Bereavement is a time when questions of the meaning of life, of what happens after death, of how to make sense of it all and of where to find strength to continue can become very important. People often find the constant cry of ‘Why?’ coming again and again.

It is sometimes very tempting to feel that life would be more bearable if you moved house, or quickly disposed of possessions, or refused to see people. However, such quick changes usually make things worse and decisions like these must be given careful thought. Don’t rush. You will

need to face many painful feelings and work through them, before beginning to rebuild your life.

With the passage of time, when the pain has eased somewhat, you will find yourself being able to treasure your good memories of times together without becoming so distressed. This can be a time for you to start taking up life afresh; a time to renew old interests and take up new pursuits. This might seem disloyal to the person who has died, but what happened in the past is always a part of you and you bring that part into your enjoyment of the present.

### **The Stages of Grief**

Some people find it helpful to think in terms of the stages of grief. Grief’s journey is a disorderly process. It is not a straight line through fixed stages, and there will be times when you feel as though you are going in circles. (It may help to think of these circles as progressive spirals.) But there are stages that often define the journey.

The first stage is one of shock and disbelief. Many have delusions of seeing or hearing the dead person; this is normal. Concentration is difficult and it is all a blur. This gives way to the second stage of intense emotion; grief, despair, anger, guilt and self-blame are all common emotions here. After several months or a year or so, you may enter a stage of depression and apathy. It suddenly hits home that this is how life is now. And then finally the fourth stage is one of accepting and adapting, even starting to find pleasure in new things.

Linked with these stages are the four ‘tasks of grief’. These can be described as, firstly, accepting the reality of the loss. It really has happened. Secondly, allowing yourself to experience the full pain and emotions of grief. Don’t bury them. The third task is adjusting to an environment without the loved one. This may include learning new skills and new ways. And finally the fourth task is to start investing emotional energy into new channels rather than into the grieving process.

But remember that the journey of grief is a very individual thing and we each react differently. So don’t feel that you are not doing it right if your journey does not appear to follow the pattern outlined here.