



# Know How to cope with bereavement

## **brainstrust information sheet**

Know Hows are published by *brainstrust* to help people living with a brain tumour to understand current topics. They are produced with input from relevant scientific and clinical experts and are written in a way that should help you to understand often complicated topics.

If you have an idea for a Know How, then please let us know.

If you have any queries, don't forget you can talk to one of our support specialists on **01983 292 405**, or email **hello@brainstrust.org.uk**.

### **Why do we need this Know How?**

Losing somebody that you love is a devastating and emotionally challenging experience to go through – nothing comes close to matching the emotions you experience. Dealing with bereavement may be something that you have been expecting, but the feelings of grief can hit quite unexpectedly. You will feel your reserves are depleted. This is not a role for which you have had any training, nor is it a job you applied for. And just when you think it is all over, more is being asked of you.

In this Know How, we will explore what we mean by grief and how it can affect us, as well as some coping strategies and support information that can help.

### **What does this mean?**

*'How people die remains in the memory of those who live on.'*

Dame Cicely Saunders (1918–2005), founder of the modern hospice movement.

When we lose someone we love, grief affects us all differently, and sometimes it's difficult to know what's normal, so what may work for one person may not necessarily work for another. It's important to acknowledge the feelings of loss and the whole range of emotions it brings – shock, anger, sadness, guilt. How you deal with it will be very individual to you, so make sure you do what feels right for you.

It is important to remember that grieving is a natural process, and there is no timetable for how long it lasts.

# Stages of the grief cycle

## 'Normal' functioning

## Return to meaningful life



### Shock and denial

- avoidance
- confusion
- fear
- numbness
- blame

### Anger

- frustration
- anxiety
- irritation
- embarrassment
- shame

### Depression and detachment

- overwhelm
- blahs
- lack of energy
- helplessness

### Dialogue and bargaining

- reaching out to others
- desire to tell one's story
- struggle to find meaning for what has happened

### Acceptance

- exploring options
- a new plan in place
- empowerment
- security
- self-esteem
- meaning



Adapted from Kübler-Ross, 1969

## The stages of grief

Grief affects us all differently. The 'stages of grief' is a recognised model dealing with grief. However, as grief is not a linear progression, these do not necessarily occur in order, as the emotional logic of grief can produce a jumble of emotions. These stages do not occur in the same way for all people: they can last very little time, and they can be interrelated.

It is normal to grieve when we experience loss; this is a natural process, and there is an emotional logic to it. If we accept that rather than fight it, it will lead to healing.

## What can I do to help myself cope?

### Counselling

Following a bereavement, you may feel that you need some extra support in the form of counselling. Bereavement counselling is designed to help people move through the stages of bereavement and learn to cope with the loss of a loved one. It aims to get you to the point where you function normally and start to move forward. As with the cycle of grief, counselling is an individual process. It isn't needed by everyone, and timing can be different. Some counsellors advise waiting six months following a bereavement to allow the natural process of grief to run, but there is no hard and fast rule regarding this. If you feel

that counselling is right for you, get in touch with us, and we can talk you through the options.

Find out more about counselling:  
[www.brainstrust.org.uk/counselling](http://www.brainstrust.org.uk/counselling)

## Strategies

These coping strategies do not require extensive training. You simply need to think about them to make them happen.

## The 8 Pillars of Strength

The 8 Pillars of Strength is a framework that can help to find ways of being and good habits that can help to build strength to manage the highs and lows throughout our lives.

These are the key structures that support us and allow us to rebuild our lives. It takes work and commitment to build the pillars; they don't just appear out of nowhere. If it seems overwhelming, choose one or two to start with, and see how you can weave them into your daily life.

You can read about the 8 Pillars of Strength [here](#).

## Self-care

### Caring for your body and staying active

It's important to take care of yourself mentally and physically. Factor some exercise into your day, even if it's just a short walk. Consider what you put into your body, and try to eat regularly. Getting enough sleep is also important in order to take care of yourself. If you find you struggle with this, try some gentle stretching or meditation before bed, or you can download a calming app – there are lots available. If you feel like a nap in the afternoon, set your alarm so it doesn't affect your night-time sleep. You can find out more about sleep hygiene [here](#).

## Making time for yourself

Make time just for you – gift yourself this time. Find something pleasurable to do. It can be something as simple as reading a book, meeting friends, watching a movie, wallowing in a bath. Having a sanctuary, a safe place where you can just 'be', is an important part of self-care. You will feel better for it.

## Joining a support group

There are support groups you can join, in person or virtually, where you can meet with others who have been through a similar situation. This can give you the opportunity to lessen isolation and meet with people who have the same shared narrative.

## Don't be afraid to ask for help

People around you want to help but aren't quite sure how, so ask. Do you need help around the house, getting shopping, or do you simply want to meet for some lunch or a coffee or a listening ear? Be specific in your ask. What are you struggling with? is always a good question to help you to identify what it is you need.

## Sharing memories

Sharing memories can be a healthy way of moving through grief, so sometimes it's good to just slow down and remember the relationship, the person and how your time together changed your lives. It's about finding an outlet for sharing them: who else knew your loved one who you could talk to about the happy times you had together? Talk about your loss and share your memories.

Make a memory box. You can make a special box and fill it with things that remind you of your loved one – photos, notes, cards, anything that means something to you and connects you with your loved one.

Consider gifting a donation in memory of a loved one, in their name, to something that they were passionate about.

## Ask yourself

- What do I need to do for myself?
- Where's my sanctuary?
- What can I do for myself?
- Who is in my team?
- What support do I need?
- How can I weave pause into my day?
- How do I find a way of expressing my grief or connecting with my feelings?
- How do I learn to accept help?

## Contact

Talk to *brainstrust*. We can help. You can call, write, type, text. Email for help and support:

**hello@brainstrust.org.uk.**

Telephone: **01983 292 405.**

## Other helpful links

[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/about-bereavement>

[www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/supporting-someone/coping-with-bereavement](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/supporting-someone/coping-with-bereavement)

[www.juliasamuel.co.uk/pillars-of-strength](http://www.juliasamuel.co.uk/pillars-of-strength)

*Expertly checked and updated January 2021.*