



Bereavement Counselling

It's ok to grieve. When someone close to us dies, our lives can quickly change, and we often have no time to adapt to the new roles we're given. For the first few days or even weeks, you may be too preoccupied to think about the change in your circumstances. However, after the funeral, when everyone else's lives seem to go back to normal, you may be left wondering how you're going to cope. There is no single solution.

Grief can be described as the emotional response to the death of a loved one. Most often grief is equated simply with sadness, though this is not exactly the case. Grief often involves a progression of different emotions and reactions that include shock and/or numbness, anxiety, anger and sadness. It may take days, weeks, months or even years for someone who is grieving to cycle through several different emotions, and some people never experience all of these emotions due to a particular loss. Others may experience some emotions related to one loss but different emotions due to another. This is perfectly normal.

Although grieving is painful, in time these feelings begin to change as you adapt to a different way of life. Grief can never be fixed, diminished or taken away. It becomes part of us, and shapes the rest of our lives. Counsellors sometimes talk about grieving or mourning in terms of stages or tasks that are worked through. Some people find these helpful but don't worry if they're not right for you.

There are some common emotions experienced by people who are grieving, sometimes called **The 5 Stages of Grief**. Some people have all of these feelings, while others may not experience any or experience them in a different order:

- *Denial* - This can't be or I don't believe this is happening to me
- *Anger* - Why is this happening to me? Who caused this to happen? How could this be happening?
- *Bargaining* - From now on, I promise to go church/visit my sick neighbour every day, and everything will be OK again
- *Depression* - What is the point of it all?
- *Acceptance* - This has really happened

There is no set itinerary for grief. Although if there is a distinct lack of emotional response, or an emotional response so overwhelming that it begins to affect a person's employment, education or personal relationships, then it may be best to consult a counsellor.

Bereavement counselling aims to help an individual explore his or her emotions. At the first meeting, the bereaved will likely be asked about their loss, about their relationship to the deceased, and about their own life now that they have lost a loved one. Answering these questions often means tapping into sadness or anger, so emotional outbursts should not be censored. Crying and yelling may come naturally during bereavement counselling and certainly will not offend the counsellor.

Also, it is important to note that not everyone experiences grief. For some people, the death of a close friend or relative is a relief, especially if the person suffered or had a drawn-out death. We cannot assume to know how someone is feeling. Understanding how someone is coping can often open up more honest conversations.

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