

Self-help in bereavement

When someone close to us dies, life can very quickly become profoundly different and very difficult. Initially, you may feel numbed by what has happened, or kept occupied by all the practicalities that have to be attended to. After a while, everyone else's life can seem to return to normal and you may feel left behind, wondering how you can go on.

You may feel abnormal, but are more likely to be responding normally to an abnormal and unwelcome situation. This leaflet has many links to and information about relevant organisations and sources of support, including our own Bereavement Support Services. You may find our [Information About Bereavement](#) leaflet helpful.

For some people, meeting with others (individually or in a group) can be helpful, but because we are all different, others prefer to grieve more privately. There are no one-size-fits-all solutions but there are some coping strategies that may be relevant to you and that you might wish to try.

Express yourself

You might try talking to people you trust, but you can also express yourself in other ways. Even if you are not someone who writes a lot, keeping a journal of your thoughts and feelings about your bereavement and how your life is changing expresses what you are living through. It can also help you maintain and develop a helpful and healing connection with the person who has died.

Allow yourself to feel what you feel

Grieving is rarely 'neat and tidy' and you may have unwelcome thoughts or feelings. Your grief may not be what you expected. Your feelings may change quickly and unexpectedly. Learning to accept and allow your experience to be what it is can be a helpful first response. Paradoxically, acceptance of how things are can become a first step in making helpful changes.

Keep up or develop a routine

When you grieve, life can feel like it has 'lost its shape'. It can be hard to continue old routines when someone who was an important or indeed a central part of them has died. It can be helpful to consciously develop even very simple daily and weekly routines. For some people, life can seem very empty and aimless after a bereavement. This is quite normal. Gradually, as time passes, things usually fall into place as a new shape of life is developed. Getting involved with things takes time and it is important to go at your own pace. At the right time, volunteering can be one way of gaining confidence, meeting people, being part of a wider community, learning new skills, and making a difference. There are lots of different volunteering opportunities to suit varied needs and wishes. [Highland Hospice has a variety of volunteer roles](#), but please note that as a general rule **we do not accept as new volunteers anyone who has experienced a significant bereavement within the previous year.**

The [Volunteer Scotland](#) website is full of information and resources about volunteering. Your local volunteer centre also makes links between potential volunteers and organisations in your area who are in need of them - find details for your local [Volunteer Centre here](#)

Pay attention to your body

When feelings and thoughts are so powerful, it can be easy to overlook your body's needs. Grieving makes great demands on your energy. You may find that life wears you much more than before, so do all you can to eat a healthy diet and get plenty of rest.

It is well-recognised that getting exercise is good for our physical health and psychological wellbeing. Starting can sometimes feel a bit daunting, and at these times it can be helpful to have the support of others. [Step It Up Highland](#) (01463 729997) is a Highland-wide voluntary organisation that has established over thirty walking groups across the area. These offer a variety of walks, with the support of a walk leader and fellow-walkers.

Avoid things that 'numb the pain'

Alcohol and other ways to 'numb the pain' can be tempting, but try to avoid using them to excess. They may offer temporary relief, but things will feel no better after the effect wears off.

Attend to life's meaning

Your bereavement may have challenged your sense of life's meaning, leaving you wondering what the purpose is. If you have a religious faith, it may be helpful to reflect on this with someone from your faith community. If you do not, there are other approaches, such as mindfulness meditation, to help explore life's purpose.

Be patient with yourself, and others

Grieving takes time, sometimes much longer than we might imagine. So be patient with yourself, especially at times you are not 'making progress' in the way you or others expected.

Be aware that others, even those close to you (who may also be grieving), won't necessarily understand in the way you would like them to. Even with best intentions they may sometimes say or do what for you is 'the wrong thing'. Try to remember that things will take time, in different ways, for everybody.

Find ways to connect with the person who has died

When someone close to us dies, their place in our life must change, but it does not have to end. Try to find helpful ways of connecting with them. Sometimes having a particular routine or ritual can help you to reconnect with the person you love. This does not need to be something you do on a particular date, but might be something you can do any time. It could be something like visiting a special place, or going on a walk that you did together. Important dates, such as birthdays, anniversaries and other celebrations, can be hard. It helps if you can think beforehand about what you want and what will help you get through the day. There is no right or wrong thing to do on these different occasions, you only need to do the things that are important to you and that help you to cope in the best way possible.

Resources and links

There are numerous self-help books available now. Many are excellent, some are not, and of course what suits one person will not suit all. Look for self-help books that have been recommended to you by someone you trust, or endorsed by a reputable organisation or health or social care professional. The same is true of websites.

Good places to start online might include [Mindfulness and Grief](#), an organisation offering resources and links to help navigate the paths of grief. NHS Scotland also offers a variety of online support: [Moodjuice](#) from Forth Valley NHS, produces self-help guides, including

one specifically about bereavement. The website of [Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland](#) includes a selection of leaflets and web-based information, and Macmillan Cancer Support have a specific bereavement section in their [Online Community](#). [AfterTalk](#) is an online grief support site offering blogs, inspiring quotes, and interactive writing tools to help you engage with and manage your grief. It's an America-based site but its content is internationally relevant.

A widely available paperback of self-help strategies in grief is [Overcoming Grief - A Self-Help Guide](#) (2012) by Sue Morris. Another well-reviewed book is [It's Ok That You're Not Ok: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand](#) (2017), by Megan Devine.