

# Grief after suicide – Possible experiences

Grief is something everyone experiences. It is a normal human response to the loss of someone we love and value. It can be said that grief is an act of love.

**Grief is a unique process to each person, and experienced and expressed differently by each individual. There is no specific time limit for grief – it takes as long as it takes.**

**Some common responses to grief can include the following – though it is important to note that not all of these will be experienced by everyone:**

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| <b>Behavioural</b>  | Isolation and social withdrawal, engaging in grieving rituals, sleeping (more or less than usual), crying, talking with friends/family about the person who died.           |
| <b>Cognitive</b>    | Confusion, forgetfulness, racing mind, poor concentration, difficulty in making decisions, a sense of unreality, repeated disturbing imagery, asking 'why?'                 |
| <b>Emotional</b>    | Shock, disbelief, sadness, tearfulness, distress, numbness, anxiety, guilt, fear, anger, irritability, intolerance of others, loss of interest in others, feeling helpless. |
| <b>Physical</b>     | Change in appetite, change in sleeping, tiredness, headaches, restlessness, colds.  |
| <b>Spiritual</b>    | Loss of meaning, loss of direction, questioning faith/beliefs, searching for understanding.   |
| <b>Relationship</b> | It is not uncommon to experience conflict in relationships after a death – take time to ensure that you support each other in your own unique ways of grieving.             |

Bereavement by suicide is traumatic and is different to other sudden deaths. For example the bereaved may feel ashamed, guilty, rejected by the person who died. They may also be worried about how others will treat them or questions they may ask about why it happened.

Trauma is caused by witnessing disturbing and horrific scenes but can also occur for those not present, when they are told about what happened. Trauma is different to grief, but both trauma and grief may be experienced at the same time, and some trauma reactions can be similar to grief responses.

**Some reactions to trauma can include:**

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| <b>Behavioural</b>  | Being easily startled by noises, social withdrawal, seeking control over tasks/events, engaging in distraction activities, alcohol and/or drug use, change in sleep/eating.  |
| <b>Cognitive</b>    | Flashbacks or re-experiencing the disturbing event while awake or in dreams, pre-occupation with what happened, repetitive thoughts, asking 'why?', confused or slowed thinking, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, forgetfulness.  |
| <b>Emotional</b>    | Lack of motivation, increased irritability, increased anxiety, panic attacks, troubled or distressed when exposed to disturbing events, fear, feelings of abandonment, isolation, powerlessness, feeling out of control or that life/the world are out of control, numbness and/or mood swings, sadness, guilt, blame, anger, frustration. |
| <b>Physical</b>     | Palpitations, trembling or sweating, breathing difficulties, headaches or muscle aches, tiredness, fatigue, restlessness, sleep problems, digestive problems.  |
| <b>Spiritual</b>    | Loss of meaning, loss of direction, questioning beliefs, searching for understanding.  |
| <b>Relationship</b> | Social withdrawal, loss of interest in social activities, avoidance of certain people, places or situations that are reminders of the experience.  |

Suicide bereavement isn't something to 'get over' or find 'closure' to. However, what does happen is that you will grow your life to accommodate the death. In this way you can keep your loved one in your heart and in your life without feeling guilty or pressured to give them up. And you can take time to grieve for them, to experience your loss and find your way to a new normal.