



**Carers Support West Sussex**  
for family and friend carers

## Life After Caring: Understanding Bereavement and Self Care Guide

We hope this guide will bring understanding, comfort and direction, to those who have recently lost someone.

# What is grief?

It is the pain we experience after a loss

- There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Everybody's journey is unique to them.
- Not allowing ourselves to experience grief may lead us to becoming stuck. This in turn can become complex grief.



# Five Stages of Grief

by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross



## 1. Denial

- Denial is the difficulty or refusal to accept that the loss has occurred
- It can be a defence mechanism to help you to process the news you have received
- We often know in our minds that our loved one is dead, but every other part of us doesn't accept it
- You may say: *"It isn't true; he/she is on holiday and they will be back soon"*



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## 2. Anger

- Anger is a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure or hostility
- You may have feelings of rage or blame at yourself or others. You may feel angry at everyone and everything.
- It is really important that you allow yourself to *feel* your anger even if it feels endless. Feeling anger is a necessary part of the healing process and will eventually dissipate and lead to healing.
- You may shout out: “*Why didn’t the doctors, hospital or the hospice do more?*”





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## 3. Bargaining

- Bargaining is the hope that your loved one can be saved in exchange for something you do differently
- It includes a deep yearning to see your loved one again; a longing to hear their voice or touch them
- Bargaining and guilt are closely linked and some of the sentences that might sound familiar to you are:

*“If I had done..... maybe this would not have happened.”*

*“If I promise never to drink again. Please can you make this pain go away.”*



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## 4. Depression

- Depression from grief can lead to feelings of: fear, regret, sadness, uncertainty, loneliness and to little interest in life
- You may feel hopeless, wanting to withdraw, feel isolated and wanting to retreat from the world
- Anxiety is another form of depression and you may notice that your anxiety is or has increased
- You may feel empty, and/or feel nothing at all
- You may have suicidal thoughts and feelings – *if you do, please speak to someone asap*



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## 5. Acceptance

- Acceptance is the ability to accept the reality that your loved one has physically gone and that your new reality is permanent
- It is accepting that the loss is still painful but you understand that your life will go on
- Grief never shrinks, but you grow round it





# The Physical Impact of Grief

## The physical pain of loss is real – and it's extremely common

- 38% experience fatigue
- 32% experience change of appetite
- 25% experience headaches
- 20% experience aches and pains
- 15% experience stomach aches
- 12% experience heart palpitations
- 10% experience other symptoms
- 5% experience new or worsening disease





# The Cycle of Grief

- The cycle diagram helps us frame and identify what we may be feeling; however our feelings are not linear in the cycle of grief
- We can flow in and out of each stage many times before we reach acceptance
- There is no right or wrong way to experience grief; everybody's experience is unique to themselves



# Your experience of grief

- Not everyone will experience all 5 stages of grief – this is completely normal
- You might notice yourself going backwards and forwards between stages – this is completely normal too.



# Acknowledging & Coping with Anniversaries



- Everybody's experience of anniversaries, birthdays and any other significant date is totally unique to them.
- Significant dates may bring all sorts of feelings and thoughts to the surface, you might notice feelings you have not experienced before.
- It is important to acknowledge these thoughts and feelings and allow yourself to react and respond in a way that is comfortable to you.





# Anniversaries

- Relationship Anniversaries
- Birthdays
- Cultural Celebrations
- Mother's/Father's Day
- New Year
- Significant Dates For Your Family & Friends
- Date Of Death



# Acknowledging Anniversaries

- Anniversaries could offer the opportunity to mark the occasion differently.
- For example; If you have always booked a meal at the same restaurant for Christmas, could you allow yourself to think of something different you would like to do, or somewhere different you would like to try?
- Or perhaps you would like to name a star, or plant a rose, or a special plant.



# Self care plan

By using the tools and ideas below, a self care plan may help you to start thinking about your future.

- How are you going to prepare for any significant anniversaries?
- You could consider using physical tools, relaxation tools, expressive tools, special person tools and social tools
- Are there any hobbies or social clubs you would like to start or re-engage with?
- Ask yourself: As a result of reading this guide, I am planning to:





# “Life After Caring” *My Toolkit*



- **Physical Tools:** Walking, bowls, tennis, crafting, patchwork, cycling, running, gardening
- **Relaxation Tools:** Reading, a favourite TV show, bubble baths, massage, haircut
- **Thinking Tools:** Writing a journal, poetry, letter writing, song writing, art, pottery
- **Special Personal Tools:** Photos, an item of clothing , memory box, scrapbook, item of clothing, aftershave or perfume
- **Social Tools:** Meeting with a friend



# Moving forward

- Finding *'You'* again
- Activities and hobbies
- Groups and clubs
- Places planned to visit
- Passions and interests
- Work /Volunteering/Studying



# My self-care plan

Tools to Build Your Plan	What I Plan to do
Physical tools	
Relaxation tools	
Expressive tools	
Special personal tools	
Social tools	
Ways to observe anniversaries	
Re-visit old interests and passions	
Other ideas for the future	





# Others, who are here to help



- Carers Support West Sussex: [carerssupport.org.uk](http://carerssupport.org.uk) T:0300-028-8888
- Cruse: [cruse.org.uk](http://cruse.org.uk) T:0808 808 1677
- Silverline: [www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk) T:0800 4 70 80 90
- Sussex Bereavement Helpline T:0300 111 2141
- The Good Grief Trust - [www.thegoodgrieftrust.org](http://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org) T:0800 448 0800
- Sue Ryder Online Bereavement Support - [www.sueryder.org.uk](http://www.sueryder.org.uk)
- Sussex Health & Care - [www.seshealthandcare.org.uk](http://www.seshealthandcare.org.uk)
- The Loss Foundation For Cancer or Covid 19 - [www.thelossfoundation.org](http://www.thelossfoundation.org)
- [ataloss.org](http://ataloss.org) <https://www.ataloss.org/live-chat>

