

Living with Bereavement

Coping with the death of someone important in your life is a deeply personal experience. When someone you love dies suddenly, it is devastating. Nothing can prepare you for the emotions that follow and the world can seem a cruel and uncaring place.

Everyone grieves in their own way, but grieving, however we do it, is a necessary process. This factsheet tells you some of the things bereaved people may experience and some things that people have found helpful.

How you might feel:

Shock and disbelief

The feeling of shock can be overwhelming. This can show itself as numbness and withdrawing from those around you, or as uncontrollable crying or despair. Sometimes bodily pain or shivering can occur. It is not unusual to feel there must be some mistake, even if you were there when the person you cared about died.

Anger

The death of someone special to you can make you feel angry. You may have directed this anger at other family members, the doctors or nurses who were unable to save your loved one, or at your religious faith. You may feel intensely angry with yourself, or even your loved one for leaving you.

Guilt

Guilt is a normal emotion following a death, and living with guilt is very hard. Meningitis and septicaemia are very complex diseases. They can develop very rapidly and no two cases are identical. Sometimes, no matter how quickly treatment is given, it is not possible to save a life. Even though rationally you know you did everything you could, you may be left with a feeling you should have done more.

Parents feel responsible for their child's safety, and may feel their child's death must have been their fault, however unfounded that belief is.

Some people feel guilt that they are still alive when their loved one has died, or about things said or left unsaid, or that they were unable to say 'goodbye' or 'I love you'.

Why?

You may have many questions, but behind them all is a need to make sense of what has happened. Some people deal with this by wanting to know more about meningitis and septicaemia. Others may not feel able to face medical facts until much later.

Searching

You may feel a desire to be close to the person who has died. This may involve going to places they visited or holding or smelling items of their clothing or favourite toys. This is very normal and many people find comfort from the feeling of closeness it brings.

It is also quite common to 'see' or 'hear' your loved one, and this reflects the strength of your feelings for them.

Looking forward

Grieving is a normal process, but everyone is different, and there is no right or wrong way of dealing with what you are feeling.

It may take a long time to feel you are able to live with your bereavement. Special occasions may be difficult and birthdays and anniversaries can be particularly painful. You can never bring back the person who has died, and the sorrow for their lost life never leaves, but as time passes, the intensity of the pain will change.

Grief and children

Children grieve too, each in their own way, and even very young children will react as they sense things have changed.

Your own intense grief may leave you temporarily unable to provide emotional support for your children. This is completely understandable and it is important that you receive support and look after yourself, which in turn can help you support your children. Perhaps for a time, a close friend or relative, with whom your children feel comfortable, could step in to give the extra care, time and attention they need.

Children often deal with bereavement differently to adults. Your child may get upset at the attention going to the person who has died, or feel the death is somehow their fault. Their behaviour may change, for example they could become clingy, sad or withdrawn, unable to concentrate, and they may bedwet. But if these problems persist, perhaps your child may benefit from some specialist help.

If you have children at school, it is a good idea to tell the teachers there has been a death in the family, and also let the staff know exactly what the child has been told.

Things that can help:

Talking about grief

It is likely you will want to talk about your loved one and their death over and over again, sometimes in minute detail. Talking is an important means of expressing your feelings and can help you to live with the death and its impact on you and your family. Although people want to help, they may not know how, or what to say. You may feel that even those closest to you – partners, children and other family members – seem distant, but they will be grieving too. Sharing your grief may bring you closer together. Meningitis Research Foundation's support staff are here for you if you would like to talk.

Don't feel you have to cope alone

Sudden death is a terrible experience, and it is natural to want to talk about how you feel. It is important not to bottle up these painful feelings. Many people find that talking about their sorrow, anger, or guilt, and finding answers to their questions with someone not directly involved with the family, can be helpful over time.

Meningitis Research Foundation's support team are here to listen to you.

Remembering

While remembering can feel painful, marking the life of someone important to you – whether through a religious funeral service or an act of secular mourning – can help provide focus on your emotions. The funeral is a time for sharing grief and memories with family, friends and neighbours and taking time to mark the significance of the life of the person who has died. You may want to spend quiet time with your loved one before or after the service. Your family members may also want to do this, to say their goodbyes. Setting up remembrance pages (see below) can also provide a focus to share their life with others.

Help and support from Meningitis Research Foundation

Meningitis Research Foundation provides support to those whose lives have been affected by meningitis and septicaemia. If you would like to talk to one of the support team please contact:

Free helpline (Mon – Fri, 9 – 5)

UK **080 8800 3344** Ireland **1800 41 33 44**

helpline@meningitis.org

Seeking help

Meningitis Research Foundation's support team are here for you and can help you find out more about bereavement organisations, some of which may be local to you. You may also be able to get specialist help and talking therapies via your GP.

Meningitis Research Foundation can also link you with other specialist organisations or counselling, including:

Cruse Bereavement Care - www.cruse.org.uk

A leading national charity for bereaved people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Winston's Wish - www.winstonswish.org

Support bereaved children, their families, and the professionals who support them.

Child Bereavement UK - www.childbereavementuk.org

Supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement.

Anam Cara - www.anamcara.ie

An organisation in Ireland and Northern Ireland providing support to all bereaved parents whose son or daughter has died. This support includes bereavement information events, parent evenings and family remembrance events.

Home visits

We may be able to visit you at home if you would feel more comfortable talking to someone face to face.

Befriending

We have a network of trained befrienders who can offer support on the phone or via email. We will match you to a befriender who will have been through a similar experience.

Remembrance Fund

If someone special to you has died as a result of meningitis or septicaemia, you can remember them in a unique and personal way by setting up an online MRF Remembrance Fund.

To find out more about setting up a Remembrance Fund visit www.meningitis.org/remembrance-fund or talk to one of the support team.

Galaxy of Stars

Every Christmas we come together to remember all of those who have lost their lives to meningitis and septicaemia through our online Galaxy of Stars. More information about how you can create your star will be announced through our online platforms in the weeks leading up to Christmas.