

**How To Help...
A Bereavement
Support
Guide**

Coping with bereavement: the death of someone close can be shattering.

Everyone experiences grief differently;

There is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve.

How we react will be influenced by many different things, including our age and personality, our cultural background and religious beliefs, our previous experiences of bereavement, our circumstances and how we cope with loss. Facing the loss of someone special is difficult and can be painful. After the person has gone there are many changes and adjustments to be made. The person, or family, who has been bereaved will often need time, space, practical and emotional support as the weeks and months progress.

As a professional you may well find yourself talking with a person(s) who has been bereaved, sometimes quite unexpectedly and we have put together this simple guide to help you feel more confident **to know what to say and to know what support exists** out there in Oxfordshire that you can signpost or support the person you are talking to, on to.

This guide does not provide you with 'counselling' training:

Bereavement counselling is a specialised type of counselling that involves supporting individuals who have experienced the loss of a loved one. This counselling helps them work through their grief as well as perhaps learn coping mechanisms to help them when they are on their own. Bereavement counselling is recommended for anyone, of any age, whose loss seems overwhelming or whose life is being adversely affected by their grief. **You would be supporting anyone for whom this is the case to access their GP.**

Rather, we hope that this guide offers some advice on what to say and what not to say as well as giving a brief overview of what the person you may be talking to will be going through.

***"The most important thing you can do for a grieving person
...is to simply be there"***

*Late Spring Oxfordshire is a member of the **Oxfordshire Bereavement Alliance** and has been running support groups for all those aged 60+ who have been bereaved for 7 years here in Oxfordshire. Created and developed in 2013 they have proved to be a popular support for those who have been bereaved with a network of over 24 now running throughout the County. Support, advice and existing resources, which include a facilitators pack, bereavement training pack, guided session ideas as well as access to a friendly voice at the end of a phone who can talk through any aspect of having a conversation with a person who has been bereaved, can be accessed by contacting latespring@aqeukoxfordshire.org.uk or phoning **01235 849 434***

Supporting someone else following a bereavement

You may find yourself in a conversation with a member of your family, a friend, a work colleague or a client/person that you are working with. Often these conversations can occur quite unexpectedly and can leave us feeling inadequate to know what to say, or do, or leave us wondering how we can help.

For people who have been bereaved all they may want to do is **talk about the person who has died**. One of the most helpful things you can do is to simply listen, and give them the time and space to grieve. Often you do not need to say anything.

Using the person's name who has passed away when talking with the person who is grieving can really make a difference.

It is **normal** for the person who is grieving to be finding it hard and to be emotional.

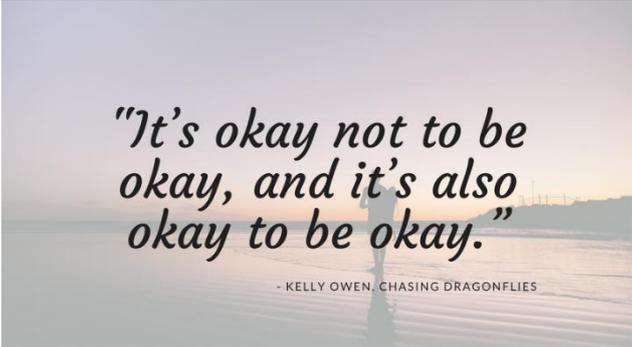
Offering specific practical help – not vague general offers – can also be very helpful and you will find a resource list at the back of this booklet with all the local organisations based here in Oxfordshire that you could help link them up to. Remember, when a person is grieving even the most simple/obvious solutions, to resolving a practical issue, are forgotten.

Do...

- Be there for the person who is grieving – pick up the phone or arrange to visit
- Accept that everyone grieves in their own way – there is no 'normal' way
- Encourage the person to talk
- Listen to them
- Create an environment in which the bereaved person can be themselves and show their feelings, rather than having to put on a front
- Offer practical help
- Be aware that grief can take a long time

Don't...

- Avoid someone who has been bereaved.
- Use clichés: 'I understand how you feel'; 'You'll get over it'; 'Time heals.'
- Tell them it's time to move on, they should be over it – how long a person needs to grieve is entirely individual.



"It's okay not to be okay, and it's also okay to be okay."

- KELLY OWEN, CHASING DRAGONFLIES

Looking after yourself.

Talking with a person who has been bereaved can be tiring, draining and emotional.

It is vital that you yourself have a way of switching off or letting go of any emotions or feelings that your conversation with them may have stirred.

Know who and where you can turn to and talk to. Within a work environment It might be your line manager or a colleague. Outside of work you may have a family member or a friend that you can turn to. Obviously, if your conversation has been with a client then you must remember to adhere to the confidentiality and data protection policies of your organisation.

Remember that the grief 'belongs' to the person that has been bereaved.

You are simply in the privileged position that they trust you enough to talk to. You have the opportunity to offer a listening ear and a warm heart to someone who is grieving, **do not be tempted to absorb their pain and their sorrow.**

GRIEF

I HAD MY OWN NOTION OF GRIEF.
I THOUGHT IT WAS A SAD TIME
THAT FOLLOWED THE DEATH OF SOMEONE YOU LOVE.
AND YOU HAD TO PUSH THROUGH IT
TO GET TO THE OTHER SIDE.

BUT I'M LEARNING THERE IS NO OTHER SIDE.
THERE IS NO PUSHING THROUGH.
BUT RATHER,
THERE IS
ABSORPTION.
ADJUSTMENT.
ACCEPTANCE.

AND GRIEF IS NOT SOMETHING THAT YOU COMPLETE.
BUT RATHER YOU ENDURE.
GRIEF IS NOT A TASK TO FINISH,
AND MOVE ON,
BUT AN ELEMENT OF YOURSELF -
AN ALTERATION OF YOUR BEING.
A NEW WAY OF SEEING,
A NEW DEFINITION OF SELF.

GWEN FLOWERS

Remember:

- **it is okay to say that you 'don't know what to say'**
- The gift of 'presence' is one of the greatest you can give to a person who is grieving
- It is better to call soon and have to call back later, than to call too late!
- If you are doing most of the talking...you may not be helping.
- Be prepared to talk about the person who has died: you can share memories with them of their loved one because of the work you did with them before they died. **Do not be afraid to use the person name.**
- Even if they do not respond today, people will remember that you cared enough to ask
- Accept them as they are. **Do not try to 'fix' everything.** They are not necessarily looking for answers / solutions at this point, rather just wanting to say 'out loud' what they are thinking / feeling
- Be realistic about the help you can offer: whilst there is a lot you can probably do to help practically / linking them up with local support you need to remember that **you cannot bring the person back and rectify what is causing their grief.**
- Don't treat them differently than 'before'
- **Let your care and concern show.** It is okay to say that you are finding it difficult.
- Sometimes a bereaved person may just want to talk about 'normal things' too. **Be ready to just chat with them as 'normal'.**

But most importantly:

Be kind to yourself: allow yourself the space after a difficult conversation to reflect, focus on the world around you, listen to some music etc...ensure, where possible, that you build in a 20 minute pause, for yourself, before moving on to the next conversation / job to do

Accept that talking with a person who has been bereaved can be hard. Death and dying is a topic that many of us try hard to avoid thinking about because if we are honest it is a topic that we all worry about ourselves.

If, when talking to a person who has been bereaved it brings emotions and thoughts to the surface for you yourself, make sure that you talk to someone about what you are feeling / thinking. You are not on your own.

“Remember, in the midst of the pain there is still life to live”

Different types of loss

Grief is a natural response to loss. It is emotional suffering that you feel when something or someone is taken away. The more significant the loss the more intense your grief will be.

Relational loss:

This may be felt not only when a loved one dies but also through divorce/separation or through mobility eg when friends/families move on to another location. Not all relational losses are bad or negative eg a grown child moving out to go to university.

Material loss:

Often people can be more upset by the loss of sentimental items than valuable items. So, especially when a loved one has died, these items may cause a lot of upset if they have been misplaced. Please note that sometimes the upset is not caused by the sentimental item itself but rather the memory of their loved one using it.

Functional / Role loss:

When the opportunity to work or function in a familiar way is no longer possible eg wife, father, carer. Many people put a high value on what they do – often what you do defines who you are – and so this kind of loss can bring a loss of identity.

Symbolic loss:

When someone dies so do the hopes and dreams that have perhaps been long held. So, in addition to the actual loss they will also be struggling with the grief of their unmet expectations. 'This is not the way things were supposed to be'.

Hidden loss:

Some personal losses are not visible to others yet the loss may take centre stage in your life. You may feel your grief profoundly with little social contact to support.

Anticipatory grief:

Can start long before the person you are caring for passes away. When a person you are close to receives a significant diagnosis you may begin to prepare yourself for the inevitable. This can leave you feeling guilty / confused as to why you are feeling this way when they are still alive.



Common feelings and reactions

As you talk with a person who has been bereaved they may raise one or other of the topics listed below. These are normal questions that someone who is grieving will be working through and it is really important that you listen to what they are saying and give them the time to express their feelings. **Remember that you will not have all the answers for them...**when a person has been bereaved they will, over a period of time, reach a place where they have found the answers for themselves.

I don't believe he's gone...

I can still hear and see her...

Even when you have known for some time that someone is going to die, there is still a sense of shock when the death occurs. You may feel cold, numb, empty and unreal for a time, and have trouble in believing that he or she is really dead and is not coming back. This sense will start to fade in a few days or weeks, although it may return from time to time. When it does, you may feel that you can hear or see him or her again, and each time there will be fresh shock and disbelief when you realise the truth of the loss. One extension of this belief is that you may dream of the person who has died; if you have lost your partner, some of these dreams may be sexual. All these feelings, while not felt by everyone, are natural and do not mean that you are going crazy.

I don't seem to be able to settle down to anything, yet there's so much that needs doing...

You may have difficulties concentrating and find that your thoughts are confused and that everything is an effort. It can be hard to motivate yourself, you may feel distracted or become forgetful and feel tired and yet have difficulty in sleeping. You may feel restless and not 'in the right place' whether at home or out of the house. This is because so much of your inner attention is taken up with making sense of your loss and managing your emotional reactions and often people find their sense of inner security is rocked for a short time. Most people cry many times when they remember the person who has died, or some part of the funeral; while this can leave you exhausted, it is a natural way of letting your feelings out. Holding them in can be just as exhausting.

I don't feel so good...

You may feel tired or low and yet have difficulty sleeping, waking early or finding it difficult to get off to sleep. Some people find that their appetite and enjoyment of food may temporarily disappear or they may have more infections than usual. Try to eat well, re-establish some routine and look after yourself. It helps to fit some exercise into the day if you can. Walking for half an hour, swimming or yoga are just as helpful as more strenuous forms of exercise. Milky drinks, a warm bath and settling down to rest with your favourite

music may help re-establish your pattern of sleep. People often feel depressed for a time after bereavement. If your feelings are too much to bear or seem to be lasting too long, do seek advice from your GP. Do remind your GP that you are bereaved as it will help him or her to give you the best treatment or advice.

I think I'm going mad...

Grief is associated with stronger emotions than many people have experienced before, and you may feel that these emotions are taking over. In fact, **people do not go mad with grief**, but while you are grieving, you may think and act differently. It may be tempting to think that things would be easier if you moved house or disposed of possessions but in fact **this is not a good time to make major changes in your life**. What seems right now may not seem right in several months' time and you may wish that you had kept treasured possessions – what may be painful reminders now in future may bring comfort and a sense of continuing connection with the person who has died. If you cannot avoid having to take important decisions, try to talk them over with a person whom you can trust and who can help you consider the various options such as a family member, close friend, spiritual advisor, solicitor or someone from a bereavement support service.

Why me?...

Many people have strong feelings of anger which may be difficult to express or understand. You may feel anger at the fact of the death itself, at being abandoned by the person who has died, or at God for allowing such a painful and seemingly pointless loss. You may also feel angry with people close to you who may not seem as upset as you are, or with those who were involved during the illness or at the time of death. Sometimes there is reasonable cause for this anger, but even if there is not, the feeling may still be there. Anger is natural following bereavement and usually gets less over time. **If you have questions about the medical or nursing care given do ask to talk them over with the staff concerned or with your GP.**

If only...

It is natural to feel at times that things would have been different if you had acted differently. There may be regrets for things said, done or not done. We are all human, and some misunderstandings and disagreements are inevitable in our relationships. When someone dies we lose the opportunity to change things with them. Guilty feelings are frequently experienced but do pass in time. If they persist it may help to talk to someone from a bereavement service, a spiritual advisor or your doctor to try to understand better why you continue to feel as you do.

I always seem to want to talk about it...

There is often a recurring need to talk about the dead person, their illness and death - the good times and the bad times. One way in which family and friends can help is to listen and to share this remembering, although they may find this listening difficult because they may not know what to say or how to be helpful. Friends and family are often available early in bereavement and less so later on. It is important to reach out to them when you need them. Don't wait for them to guess how you feel.

Sometimes it can be hard to get the help you need from those closest to you as people do show their grief in different ways even when mourning the 'same' death. You may find that some members of your family want to cry and to talk about the person who has died while others may want to keep their feelings to themselves and to mourn privately. This can be hard to understand but there is no right or wrong way to grieve. If other people are not around for you or can't understand your reactions you may find it helpful to talk to someone from a bereavement service who will have time to listen.

Sometimes I can't remember...

Life may seem flat and aimless, but you should allow your memories to come and go - whether they are good memories or bad. Just as our own faults can lead to regrets and feelings of guilt, we must remember that other people have faults too. We preserve their memory more fully if we remember the whole person, faults as well as virtues. If you find your memories have gaps, try talking with someone who will help you to explore these spaces and fill them. Try writing them down in a memory journal as you can add more to each memory as time passes. It is often difficult to remember the person you love as he or she was before their illness. This will gradually pass as the memory of that time fits into the other memories of your life together. **Grieving is not about 'forgetting'** – those that are important to us, and have helped to make us who we are, will continue to be part of our lives whether physically present or not.

Sometimes I can't forget...

It may be that you find yourself continually having distressing memories – replaying events that happened during the illness or during the last few days or hours leading up to the death. These images can be very disturbing and if you feel that cannot get beyond them to more comforting memories do seek help from your GP or from a bereavement service.

I don't think I'll ever be happy...

Things may feel so bad that you cannot see any prospect of them ending. In some ways they don't end, because your memories remain, but much of the pain does become less acute. At some stage, you will find that your sadness begins to be interrupted by feelings of pleasure. This does not mean that you are no longer caring for the dead person. Special anniversaries, including birthdays and Christmas can be particularly difficult. You may need extra help at such times - **do ask for it.**

No-one seems to understand how I feel – they tell me I should have got over it by now...

People who tell us not to get upset mean well, but perhaps do not realise that distress is natural when someone close to us dies. You may want the privacy that comes from being alone, but at other times find loneliness a burden. If you feel alone try to tell someone, and ask for companionship. You may find yourself hurt and convinced that some of your friends are avoiding you. This does happen, often as a result of them “not knowing what to say”. It may be up to you to make the first step. If your family and friends do not understand your need to be upset and to grieve it may help you to seek support.

In the longer term, you may feel that your life has been changed by your experience of grieving. You might find yourself reassessing your priorities, beliefs, hopes and values. You may find that you are more aware and understanding of other peoples' difficulties, that you are able to live with the often unanswerable question 'why' and that you feel 'stronger' and more able to cope with life because of your loss.

***The most important thing you can do for a grieving person...
is to simply be there and to listen”***

OXFORDSHIRE BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

AGE UK OXFORDSHIRE

Offers a wide range of services including Phone befriending and the Community Information Network that provides access to a range of groups and organisations offering practical and emotional support to older people as well as offering a wide range of activities.

Late Spring Oxfordshire offers bereaved people aged 60+ the opportunity to meet with others over tea and cake. Sessions provide an opportunity to remember with others who understand. Meeting twice a month in 25 locations across Oxfordshire.

01235 849434

www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire

latespring@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk

ARCHWAY

Provides a supportive, understanding and friendly environment and a range of activities for people feeling lonely and isolated. Activities include social evenings, befriending, drop-in café and group outings

01865 790552

www.archway.moonfruit.com

office@archwayfoundation.org.uk

BLESS BEREAVEMENT, LOSS AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICE

BLESS provides 1-1 support for Jewish people (and people with Jewish connections) living in Oxfordshire.

07503 650710

bleess@ojc-online.org

CHIPPING NORTON FRIENDSHIP CLUB

Offer help and support to men and women, young and old, who have lost a life partner through bereavement. Monthly meetings (Saturdays), lunches, coach trips and social activities.

Pat Smith **01608 678456**

CRUSE, Bereavement Care Oxfordshire branch – for all bereaved adults

A national organisation with a local branch covering Oxfordshire. Provides individual and group support, counselling, social 'friendship' groups, a group for people bereaved by suicide (in collaboration with Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide) and runs a project working with homeless people in hostels and supported housing in Oxford.

Contact the Oxford office: **01865 245398** (10am -1pm weekdays)

National Helpline: **0808 808 1677** (9.30am – 5pm Monday to Friday, and until 8pm on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday)

www.oxfordcruse.co.uk

admin@oxfordcruse.co.uk

FAITH GROUPS

All denominations offer support to all those who have been bereaved. They offer annual memorial services as well as individual support through their pastoral care systems. To access your local faith group contact the vicar, priest, Imam, Rabbi

Churches together in Oxfordshire can be contacted by emailing ctoshire@gmail.com

www.churchestogetherinoxfordshire.org.uk

FOOTPRINTS

A bereavement support group under the umbrella of Christ Church, Abingdon. Held monthly on the second Tuesday from 10.30am – 12pm. New Barn Café, Northcourt Road. Abingdon, OX14 1PL

01865 682350

www.cca.uk.net

HOME START, OXFORDHIRE

Home-Start is a national organisation with 3 branches in Oxfordshire. Offers practical, emotional and befriending support to families (with at least one child under five) experiencing difficulties managing parenting for a variety of reasons. Support is free, confidential and non-judgemental.

South Oxfordshire: **01235 511152**

homestartso@btconnect.com

Oxford: **01865 779991**

admin@homestart-Oxford.org.uk

Banbury: **01295 266358**

info@home-startbanbury.org.uk

www.home-start.org.uk

HELEN AND DOUGLAS HOUSE FAMILY SUPPORT TEAM

Individual and group support and counselling for families of Helen or Douglas House patients.

01865 794749

www.helenanddouglas.org.uk

THE HUMMINGBIRD CANCER SUPPORT AND THERAPY CENTRE

Provides a variety of support services and counselling, including bereavement support, to people in the Bicester area affected by cancer.

01869 244244

info@thehummingbirdcentre.org.uk

www.thehummingbirdcentre.org.uk

KATHARINE HOUSE HOSPICE BEREAVEMENT SERVICE

Offers support and counselling to families and friends of Katharine House Hospice patients.

01295 811866

www.khh.org.uk

Srinder.Singh@khh.org.uk

LESBIAN AND GAY FOUNDATION

A national charity delivering advice, support and information services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) communities.

Helpline: **0345 3 30 30 30**

www.lgbt.foundation.org

THE LISTENING CENTRE

Provides low-cost counselling to people in Oxford who are otherwise unable to afford it. Volunteer counsellors and psychotherapists work from centres in Blackbird Leys, Rosehill and Barton.

01865 794794

www.thelisteningcentre.org.uk

THE LOSS FOUNDATION

The Loss Foundation is a charity run by health professionals offering support groups and social events in London and Oxford for people who have lost a loved one to cancer. Offers opportunities for people to share stories; to talk, listen, eat cake, or simply be.

0300 200 4112

info@thelossfoundation

www.thelossfoundation.org

MAGGIE'S OXFORD - FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY CANCER

Offers bereavement support to those affected by cancer through support groups and individual counselling. National website hosts an on-line facilitated bereavement support group.

01865 751882

www.maggiescentres.org

oxford@maggiescentres.org

MUCH LOVED.COM

Offers an online 'grief chat' space: an online, free service, manned by trained counsellors. It is also a place where you can create an online memorial or tribute for free.

Grief chat available online from 9am – 9pm Monday to Friday (or by email outside of these hours)

www.muchloved.com

www.muchloved.com/creatememorial

OXFORD UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST BEREAVEMENT SERVICE

Provides a compassionate administrative service to support families cared for in the John Radcliffe, Churchill, Horton and the Nuffield Orthopaedic Hospitals in the immediate period after a patient has died. The service facilitates, where possible, for families of the bereaved to ask questions about the care given by the Trust in the days following the death of their relative. The Bereavement Services supports all families who have experienced a sudden child or adult death and assists families in meeting their cultural and religious requirements for funeral arrangements or repatriation. The bereavement service assists in offering resources following pregnancy and neonatal loss and the options for funeral arrangements for babies dying at, or near, the time of birth.

01865 220110

www.ouh.nhs.uk/patient-guide/bereavement-service.aspx

SAMARITANS

Offers a 24 hour confidential and emotional support helpline.

Helpline: **116 123**

www.samaritans.org

SANDS (STILLBIRTH AND NEONATAL DEATH SOCIETY) OXFORDSHIRE

National charity for people affected by the death of a baby during pregnancy or after birth. Oxfordshire Sands holds informal meetings every two months where individual stories can be shared and support and practical advice offered. Run by volunteers who are all bereaved parents. Information and recommended reading available on website

National Helpline: **020 7436 5881**

Local befrienders: **07513 295504**

befriender@oxfordshiresands.org.uk

www.oxfordshiresands.org.uk

info@oxfordshiresands.org.uk

SEESAW - GRIEF SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN OXFORDSHIRE

SeeSaw provides direct grief support throughout Oxfordshire for children and families before and after the death of a parent or sibling.

01865 744 768

www.seesaw.org.uk

info@seesaw.org.uk

SOBELL HOUSE BEREAVEMENT SERVICE

Offers support and counselling to families and friends of Sobell House patients.

01865 225878

www.sobellhouse.org.uk

smsb.bereavementservice@ouh.nhs.uk

SUERYDER ONLINE COMMUNITY

Their website offers a wide range of information and advice on a range of topics.

www.community.sueryder.org
www.sueryder.org/practical-considerations-when-someone-dies

TALKING SPACE OXFORDSHIRE

Talking Space is part of the NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme offering help to people (age 18+) with depression or anxiety. Access via GPs or by self-referral.

01865 901222

talkingspaceplus@nhs.net
www.talkingspaceplus.org.uk

THE WAY AHEAD

A social group for bereaved, single and retired people. Meets monthly in Oxford, arranges trips, meals and other social gatherings.

01865 880634 (Diane) or **01865 559081** (Joyce)

WAY FOUNDATION (WIDOWED AND YOUNG)

Helps young widowed people (up to age 51) through social events. Run by young widowed volunteers. Organises holidays, website provides information, a chat room and on-line support groups and has an active local branch in Oxfordshire.

0300 012 4929

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk
info@widowedandyoung.org.uk

WAY UP

WAY UP is a mutual help group created to support the needs of anyone (over the age of 50) who has lost a long term life partner. Provides a national web-based group and offers meetings and events all over the UK, including Oxfordshire.

www.way-up.co.uk
info@way-up.co.uk

YOUNG DEMENTIA UK

YDUK offers support services for younger people with dementia (under 65) and their families. Offers individual support both before and after a bereavement.

01865 794311

www.youngdementiauk.org
mail@youngdementiauk.org