



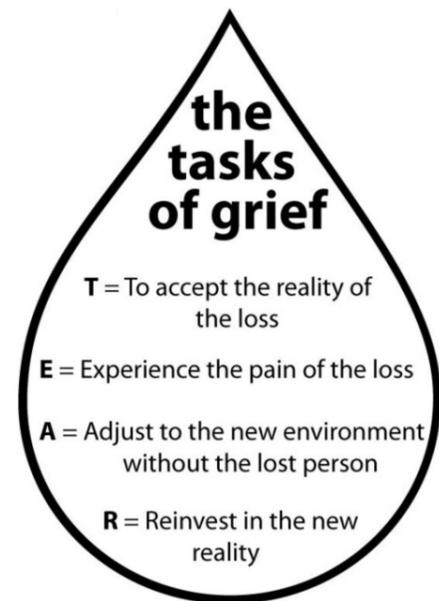
Bereavement Support



Grief and Bereavement

Major bereavement is not something we 'get over.' People can learn how to live with it and rebuild their lives, but often don't 'get over' it. The feelings we have about bereavement may be revisited over the years but the strength of feeling and frequency will lessen. People will respond differently to bereavement and there is no 'right way' to grieve, but there are things that can help. Support from friends, family, the wider community and support services can help people to work through their feelings.

Worden's TEAR Model of Grief (1991) suggests there are 4 'tasks' of grief. These are things that people need to complete in order to move on with their lives following bereavement.



T: Involves coming to terms with the end of the person's life. It is common to feel denial, shock and disbelief at this stage. Your mind may try to deny that the death has occurred in order to avoid the pain of the loss. You may imagine you see the person, or hear them coming through the door. Acceptance marks the moment we are ready to begin healing.

E: There is no way to avoid grief. It will naturally bring a vast array of emotions- sadness, longing, emptiness, loneliness, anger, numbness, anxiety, and confusion. It is important that we experience whichever emotions we have as this is a natural part of the grieving process. It can bring with it exhaustion, lack of sleep, loss of appetite and physical aches and pains. It is important that we focus on self-care during this time, eating healthily, taking light exercise and spending time with people we feel comfortable with.

A: At some stage we begin to start getting back into old routines. Children will return to school, adults in the house may return to work and we may begin to engage in social events again. This will take longer for some than for others depending on the relationship of the deceased and the role they played in your life. This task can include learning new life skills for example, parenting alone, being an only child or paying the bills.

R: This task is about finding a comfortable balance between remembering and maintaining a connection with the person who has died and continuing living. This may include new hobbies or relationships. It is about living our lives with purpose and meaning without denying that the other person lived. This stage can take a long time and may take a few re-dos. People often feel guilt or like they are betraying the person who died when they move on. That is natural. People can choose to stay engulfed in sadness as this often feels like a closer connection to the person who has died, but when you are ready you can choose to begin the healing process and start to live again, whatever that may look like for you.

Bereavement due to drug-related death

Drug-related deaths can be caused by a number of things and does not always mean that the person who died was addicted. For example a young person who dies after experimenting with drugs or someone who has an accident while under the influence.

In other situations families may have found that they have been coping with the frustration, stress and pain of the person's substance use for a long time. They may feel that they 'lost' the person they knew many years before because of the substance use. Other families may have lost contact with their loved one who used substances. For the bereaved person, this can feel like a 'double loss.'

Whatever the situation, the death will always come as a shock. These bereavements can feel more complicated than most due to the nature of the cause of death. If the death was drug-related it can be more challenging for the family and friends because of stigma around substance use. Due to the behaviours of the person who died, friends and family are often met with stigmatising responses rather than sympathy and support. This can leave the family and friends feeling that their grief is unacknowledged and feel shame in talking about their loved one. This makes the grieving process more complicated.

Bereavement due to a drug-related death can be complicated by:

- Stigma around substance use by people they know and media
 - A belief that the death was premature and avoidable
- Feelings of guilt that they were not able to help the person
- A challenging relationship with the person prior to the death
 - Police and court involvement
- A loss of hope that the person would stop using substances

Allow yourself to be sad - you are feeling sad because of the loss and that is okay. Having a range of emotions is a natural part of the grieving process. Try to keep up some of your daily routines. Keeping up simple tasks like taking the dog for a walk or making the bed can help you to feel in control.

Sleep - feeling sad and being emotional can be tiring. Try to sleep when you can. If you are struggling to sleep there are a few things you can try to make sleep easier:

- Avoid Caffeine
- Avoid anything too stimulating before bedtime- TV, Social Media etc.
- Try reading or mindfulness to relax the mind before you try to sleep

'I had tried for so long to come to terms with the loss of my husband. He was clean and sober and doing really well. It was such a shock to the whole family when he was found dead and my world fell apart.'

Eat Healthily - A well balanced diet can help with mood. If you want to have something unhealthy, allow yourself that, but try where possible to make healthier choices.

Avoid things that 'numb the pain' - Alcohol and other substances will make you feel worse when their effects wear off.

Talk about it - If you have a supportive friend or family member who you feel comfortable talking to, tell them how you are feeling. Try to be honest about how you feel. If you don't feel comfortable talking to friends and family, a support service, bereavement group or counsellor may be better. Contact our free, confidential helpline on: **08080 10 10 11** (select option 2) and our dedicated bereavement advisors will listen to you and can advise you on support available to you, including up to six free sessions with a qualified, accredited bereavement counsellor.

If you feel you are not coping it can really help to access support. Maybe you are struggling to sleep or your intense feelings are not going away. Maybe you are struggling to get back into a 'normal' routine or have symptoms of depression or anxiety. You can speak with your GP or contact our service and we can find support that is suitable for your needs.

Some words from our counsellors:

“Bereavement of a loved one can turn our worlds upside down. We can experience many emotions and reactions, including, shock, guilt, confusion, anger, anxiety and deep sadness. Counselling gives you the opportunity in a safe environment to express all your emotions. Clients I have worked with have regained some calm and balance in their lives in the short term and in the longer term, have begun adjusting and are able to enjoy the memories of their loved ones.”

“To lose a loved one in any circumstances can be absolutely devastating. However, to lose a loved one in circumstances which involve drugs or alcohol can be especially difficult as there are often additional challenges to face. The stigma, prejudice and misunderstanding that regularly surround addiction can make the task of grieving so much more difficult. Being able to access help and support is so important and will, without doubt, be a lifeline for many people.”

Supporting someone else who has been bereaved

Whether you are a friend, family member or service supporting someone who has been bereaved can be challenging. Some key points to consider when supporting someone:

Show kindness and compassion - This may seem obvious but when we are busy and stressed in our own lives it can be easy to forget. No matter what the circumstances of the death, the feelings of loss are the same. Offer condolences, allow the person time, listen to them and try not to make assumptions as to how they must be feeling. Turn off mobile phones or other distractions and give the person your full attention.

Language is important - Consider the impact of judgemental language such as 'junkie' or 'alchy'. This can place judgement on the person who died. Try to avoid this language and refer to the person who died as a person first. The person who is bereaved may use this language themselves, but it may not be appropriate for you to. The bereaved person may mention that they feel relief that they no longer have to worry. Be accepting of this, but try not to raise this if they have not mentioned it themselves.

Every bereaved person is an individual - Try not to assume that the bereaved person is like every other bereaved person you have met. They may have different feelings and experience grief in different ways. Try to remain open-minded and listen to their feelings and desires. If you work in a service and have experience a number of drug-related deaths it can be easy to be slightly desensitised to this, this may not be the case for the person who is bereaved however, try to empathise with them as an individual.

Everyone can make a contribution - Don't be afraid to talk to the bereaved person about the death, it is important that it is acknowledged. Ask the person what they want of you and what may help. Let the person know that you are or when you are available and make sure they have your contact details. Do not assume someone else will support them.

Working together - Make the person aware of support that is available to them, either through yourself, your service or other support services. If you are unsure of suitable support services, do some research on the person's behalf. You can contact our free, confidential helpline for local and national support service information.

For more information on working with people who have been bereaved through substance use you can access Peter Cartwright's (2015) research, "Bereaved Through Substance Use: Guidelines for those whose work brings them into contact with adults bereaved after a drug or alcohol-related death." University of Bath at <http://www.bath.ac.uk/cdas/documents/bereaved-through-substance-use.pdf>

Scottish Families Bereavement Support Service

How can I contact the service?- We can refer you to the service if you contact our helpline 08080 10 10 11 and select option 2, email helpline@sfad.org.uk or use the webchat on our website (www.sfad.org.uk). If you would like to use the service, the bereavement adviser will take your name, location, and phone number to pass it onto our team. We ask for your location so that we can find a counsellor closest to you. You can also let us know if there is a specific day or time you would like to be called. Our team will contact you within five working days to explain how our service works and answer any questions you might have. If you are happy to go ahead, we will find a counsellor near you who will contact you and arrange a suitable time, date and venue for your sessions.

What happens? - The counselling sessions will last around 50 minutes and the counsellor will give you time to talk and offer support. We usually offer six sessions but everyone is different so if you and the counsellor agree that you would benefit from more we can arrange this. If your sessions have ended and you feel you still need support, this could be a few days, months or years later, you can contact us again to use the service.

What areas are covered by this service? - Anybody who is a resident in Scotland any over the age of 16 is eligible for our bereavement service. We have a network of counsellors across Scotland.

Will this be confidential? - Yes. We will not share your details with other organisations, only your allocated counsellor.

What if I can't make a session? - If you are unable to attend your session, please give your counsellor at least 24 hours notice so that it can be rescheduled. If you miss a session without notice, this will count as one of your sessions.

Funeral Funding Advice - If you are on a low income, Down to Earth can help with organising a funeral. They do not provide grants but can help you find money that you may be entitled to from other sources. Helpline: 020 8983 5055.

“I was apprehensive of getting counselling as I didn't like to talk about it but I knew something had to change. From the first call to Scottish Families everything seemed so easy and within a week I had my first counselling appointment booked. Since then I've never looked back. It's been 13 months since I had my counselling and my life is back on track.”

- Family Member

**Are you
concerned
about
someone's
alcohol or
drug use?**



Freephone helpline
08080 10 10 11

helpline@sfad.org.uk
webchat
www.sfad.org.uk



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General enquiries: 0141 465 7523 | info@sfad.org.uk

Edward House, 199 Sauchiehall Street Glasgow G2 3EX

Recognised Scottish Charity (SC034737)



**Scottish
Families**
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