

# BEREAVEMENT



Tragically some families experience the death of a loved one as a result of their drug and/or alcohol use. The death of a loved one is a devastating experience and family members often struggle to cope. Although each individual's experience and loss is unique, there are some common reactions that families may experience, and coping mechanisms that families may use following the death of a loved one.

Bereavement is the process or journey we go through as we adjust to the loss of someone we love and feel connected to. Everyone develops their own way of grieving and there is no one "right way" to grieve. It is very important to mention that there are no shortcuts in bereavement and it may at times feel overwhelming as bereavement affects your whole being. Sometimes during the bereavement process, we can feel "stuck" and unable to move forward. This is a normal part of the process. Sometimes too we can feel that we are moving backwards instead of forwards – again this is quite common in the journey through bereavement.

Bereavement affects your *thoughts and beliefs* including feelings of confusion, shock, disbelief, numbness, and preoccupation, and can lead to possibly questioning your religious beliefs or indeed questioning life's purpose and meaning.

Bereavement affects your *emotions* including shock, anger, guilt, relief, loneliness, anxiety, and sadness.

Bereavement affects your *behaviour* including: searching for, seeing or hearing the person who died, visiting places your loved one frequented, withdrawing from other family members/friends, constantly visiting the grave, needing to tell and retell things about your loved one, becoming busy and frantic, or not wanting to get up out of bed.

Bereavement affects your *body* including loss of appetite or overeating, sleep disturbance, low energy, illnesses, tightness in the throat, a pain in the chest and fatigue.

These are some of the responses to loss but there are many more that a bereaved person may experience at different times and in varying degrees throughout the bereavement process. It can be useful to be able to identify different expressions of grief so that you can build an understanding of the grieving process within the family. Grief affects us all in different ways and that is why we are only experts in our own grief. Grief is a normal response to loss and can last far longer than people realise or expect. It is important to bear in mind that other family members may grieve in different ways, for example, one may want to talk incessantly about the family member who has died and another may find it too painful to speak their name. This can sometimes create conflict in the family. Family occasions are often very difficult.

There are many other complex emotions and feelings that may arise such as the stigma of

death due to drugs or alcohol. This can make it more difficult to grieve as you may feel shame and try to hide your grief from others. Sometimes there is a feeling of relief on the death of a loved one who had a drug/alcohol problem. You may be relieved that your loved one may be at peace. You may also be relieved that you no longer have to live with substance misuse. This can lead to feelings of guilt and shame but it is important to remember that your reaction to the bereavement is normal. While these reactions are quite normal they are nonetheless still very difficult.

Here are some suggestions that may help you through your grief

- Talk about your loved one and how their death is affecting you
- Do not distance yourself from people who care about you even if it sometimes feel that they do not understand your pain. Let them know how you are feeling and accept their support
- Please give yourself time. Grief absorbs a lot of energy and a lot of time and everybody copes with their loss in different ways. Be patient and kind to yourself
- Do not rely on drugs or alcohol to make you feel better
- There are some excellent books available on bereavement which can help you understand what you are going through
- Join a bereavement support group or speak to a bereavement counsellor
- Grief often comes in waves: allow yourself to cry

## Inquests

An inquest may be held if a death cannot be explained in order to establish the facts and cause of death. An inquest is an official public enquiry typically presided over by a Coroner and in some cases a jury. The inquest is not held for at least six weeks after a death. An inquest would not normally be held if a post mortem

examination could explain the cause of death. The family of the deceased are entitled to attend the inquest, but they are not bound by law or legally obliged to be there. Family members are allowed to ask questions or seek clarity on any points raised. When the proceedings have been completed, a verdict is returned in relation to the identity of the deceased, and how, when and where the death occurred. The range of verdicts open to the Coroner (or jury) include accidental death, misadventure, suicide, open verdict, natural causes and unlawful killing. Nobody is found guilty or innocent at an inquest and no criminal or civil liability is determined. When the inquest is completed, the Coroner issues a certificate so that the death can be properly registered.

For more information on inquests, see [www.coroners.ie](http://www.coroners.ie)

## Bereavement through suicide

Bereavement through suicide is very traumatic and often leaves the family with more questions than answers. The process of bereavement can be more prolonged and difficult. Feelings of utter bewilderment, guilt, isolation, fear, anger, disbelief, shame and confusion are common. Grief can manifest itself in physical pain and illness. It is important to try to care for yourself during this time. Support groups can be very helpful as you find others in a similar situation who can offer comfort and advice, and give suggestions and information.

## Other sources of information and support

Citizens Information Services office/website contains information on what to do immediately after a death, possible social welfare entitlements, tax, financial and legal issues that may arise and where to go for further information and support. Other support services that are available include:

[www.anamcara.ie](http://www.anamcara.ie)

[www.rainbows.ie](http://www.rainbows.ie)

**Refer to Information on Support Services section or [www.supportme.ie](http://www.supportme.ie) for details on supports available**