

Grief Awareness



National Grief Awareness Day is on August 30th and the information for this article is taken from the National Grief Awareness Week website which is accessed via <http://nationalgriefawarenessweek.org/>

Here you will find information that is both interesting and practical in terms of posters and campaigns. The aim is to reduce the stigma around talking about death and grief, encouraging those who have been bereaved to come forward and share their stories.

DISTANCE SHOULDN'T MEAN WE CAN'T SHARE OUR GRIEF

2020 the year of the Global Pandemic will always be remembered as a year of challenge, uncertainty, fear, disbelief, helplessness and change. We have all had to begin to think and act differently. Our work environment and method of working has changed enormously for most people with “working from home” the new normal for many. Safety and caution have taken on new meaning as people struggle with what are often confusing guidelines and instructions from the different leaders across the UK. One of the most challenging things has been the rule of “distance” where we have at times been unable to meet with loved ones, friends or colleagues, but have had to learn to “manage” these meetings virtually. Festivals, weddings and family gatherings have been discouraged causing great disappointment and heartache for many. Never more so than a bereavement, the death of a loved one, family member or friend. Those who have been bereaved have not been able to have the usual comfort of a hug, a reassuring touch or the human connection vital to the grieving process. For many this has caused a good deal of distress, making the grief so much more difficult to manage. However, distance should not stop us from connecting and reaching out to others in whatever way we can.

YOUR STORY COULD BECOME SOMEONE'S HOPE

During the COVID-19 Pandemic those who have experienced a bereavement whether COVID related or not, have felt even more lonely and isolated than would usually be expected. They have not been able to share their grief with others, often grieving alone. Funerals have been delayed and there have been only the smallest of gatherings (if any) allowed at funerals. Even these have been conducted differently, often being conducted via a video link so that those not allowed to attend could at least share in some way. Culturally, this has been unsatisfactory as not every culture treats death and bereavement in the same way. However, sharing our stories and experiences may help others to understand some of the impact grief and loss has, hopefully enabling conversations to take place and allow feelings, thoughts and emotions to be aired and shared.

JUST BECAUSE I'M SMILING DOESN'T MEAN I'M NOT GRIEVING

Sometimes, following a bereavement people try to hide their grief from family and friends. There is a feeling that others won't be able to cope if they only realised the extent of our own personal feelings at the time. When asked how we are feeling the response is often "I'm fine" or "I'm coping" when in fact we may feel as if we are breaking inside. Sharing those feelings are often felt to be "burdening" others, so we smile and get on with things. This is so often the case particularly if the spouse passes away at a younger age and there are children to consider. The parent left tries to compensate for the missing parent. This of course gives a false message to the children who then struggle to manage their feelings because they do not want to upset the parent. This means the "normal" pattern and feelings of grief are hidden and that "stiff upper lip" comes into play.

SAY THEIR NAME, I'M THINKING ABOUT THEM ANYWAY

When someone has died there is often an anxiety around mentioning the name of the deceased person. We feel that if we mention the person it will cause upset, when equally not mentioning the person by name can cause upset. This is particularly common in the workplace when someone returns following a bereavement. Colleagues and managers often skirt around the subject without saying the name mainly because they think they are protecting the person, when really it is often because people don't always know how to best support someone who is grieving. However, talking about the person, remembering them, sharing stories and memories about them can be helpful as it helps to keep the memories alive and demonstrates how much the person was thought of, loved and respected.

THERE'S NO ONE FACE OF GRIEF

Grief shows no respect of age, culture, class, gender or religion. We will all at some point in our lives experience the loss of a loved one. We do know that despite death being the outcome, everyone will experience and deal with loss differently. The pandemic has affected the way in which people grieve and it needs to be recognised that support is still needed. Coping, managing, surviving are all words common to the process, as are shock, disbelief, anger, sadness etc. We will probably experience them all over a period of time.

THERE'S NO SET TIME FOR GRIEVING

We say that we "get over" grief, that we "move on". Maybe that is a myth in the same way as "time heals" - perhaps it isn't that time by itself heals, but more what we do with that time that can bring about the healing? There are the general common tasks to be done following a bereavement and this is a time when we are busy, trying to register the death, organise the funeral, contact family, friends and colleagues. People talk about being on "automatic" during this period. Financial issues need to be addressed and this is where information is sent to Probate. What happens though after all these things are completed? There is a belief that the burial (the funeral) itself is the end and people are often heard to say "thank goodness that is over" or "you have done them proud, what a lovely send-off". Sadly, things just don't return

to normal and this is often when feelings of loneliness, anger and grief can really begin. In fact, people at this point are often in need of the most support. In supporting we need to be able to talk about the deceased person, to acknowledge them and to recognise that there will be events that trigger memories and, these often seem to just happen without warning and that they may come for months or even years to come.

Support 'Grief awareness day' by talking about it and sharing your experiences. Remember to be kind to yourself and others in their loss and remember that it is both okay and appropriate to be sad. It is a normal part of the process.

If you would like to view the Webinar on '**Grief Awareness**' in advance to Grief Awareness Day, it is being delivered live on **Monday 21st August at 12pm**, please use the following link to register for this session –

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7611290511176848474>

If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place.

If you feel you may need some support, you can contact Care first. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.