



The University of
Nottingham

Coping with

LOSS &

BEREAVEMENT



The University of
Nottingham

University Counselling Service

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What is grief ?

THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES, WE ALL HAVE TO FACE CHANGE AND LOSS. Sometimes this involves a great deal of emotional pain. It may be difficult to make sense of what is happening. Sometimes loss can undermine our sense of who we are.

The death of someone close may be the most severe form of loss, but other losses can also affect us deeply. Divorce or separation, exam failure, leaving home or university, injury or ill health, the breakdown of a friendship or of a relationship, or the death of a pet, may have deep significance.

Coping with bereavement, or a major loss, can be particularly difficult when you are at university. Being away from home, at a time when you most need the support of family or friends, may leave you feeling isolated. You may feel that you do not know your new friends at university sufficiently well to share your feelings. You may think the people around you have not had similar experiences and will not be able to understand. In addition, the pressure of exams and deadlines can seem relentless.

How does grief affect people ?

GRIEF IS NOT A ONE-OFF EVENT BUT A NATURAL PROCESS OF ADJUSTMENT TO LOSS. It is rather like going on a journey that a person does not want to take. He or she may want to get it over and done with and get back to normal but it takes time. People experience a whole range of feelings in response to loss and sometimes worry that they are going mad, but these feelings are normal.

Shock

Sudden, or unexpected, loss may produce a state of shock as a natural anaesthetic to insulate against overwhelming pain, or the person may experience:

- Tearfulness
- Physical and emotional pain
- Shivering, sweating and dizziness
- Palpitations, panic
- Sleep and appetite disturbance
- Fatigue.

Numbness

He or she may feel numb and may:

- Avoid emotion
- Become withdrawn
- Feel isolated
- Feel unable to think, concentrate or make a decision
- Behave in an irrational way
- Use alcohol or drugs to cope.

Denial

Denial is a normal response to loss and it may pass quickly, or last for a long time. The person may:

- Feel that “it can’t be true” and “This is not happening to me”
- Expect the person who has been lost to return
- Continue to behave as if nothing has happened
- Keep busy even to the point of exhaustion
- Feel that he or she can see or talk with the person who has gone. Alternatively, he or she may think constantly about the loss.

The grieving process may be delayed, or pushed aside by other life events, only to surface, possibly years after the actual loss, taking the person by surprise.

Anger

A common response to loss or death is anger. “Why didn’t someone do more?” “How could they leave me all alone?” “Why me?” This can be very difficult for the person who is feeling angry and for others. But anger is a normal and appropriate response and it can be helpful to talk about these feelings.

Guilt

A person may feel guilty and may be troubled by thoughts of “if only . . .” These are common feelings for people who are dealing with loss.

MOVING ON

At the time, the person may feel as they will never get over it. Gradually, he or she will no longer think constantly about the loss. This, in itself, can feel like a betrayal.

As time passes, anniversaries and milestones in the year become less difficult. There will come a time when he or she may find a place for the person or the loss that allows him or her to get on with life. However, a significant loss or bereavement may produce profound changes in the self, in relationships with others and with the world.

How

can

you help

yourself ?

IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED A LOSS OR BEREAVEMENT:

- You may feel vulnerable and accident prone and it can be a relief to have support from family and friends
- There are many people in the University to whom you can turn for support. These may include your personal tutor or the senior tutor in your Department or School, your hall tutor or hall warden, or any other member of staff. There are other members of the University community who will offer support including the chaplains, the Students' Union welfare officer and the welfare reps in the halls of residence
- Funerals, rituals or finding some way to say goodbye, may help you accept the reality of the loss
- Allow yourself to feel sad, to talk about it again and again, to weep and to dream. These are all natural ways of making sense of your loss
- If you are having trouble sleeping, don't lie in bed tossing and turning. Get up and make a drink, read, listen to the radio or find something that comforts you
- Ask friends and family for what you want. This may be company, a meal, to be left alone, to talk, to listen, to just be there. People often don't know what to say or do and they may be glad to have some guidance
- Accept that you will be in emotional turmoil and don't make any major decisions about moving away, giving up your course or ending a relationship, while you are not quite yourself
- Let your personal tutor, or the senior tutor, or another member of staff in your Department or School know if your difficulties are affecting your academic work, so they can help you with arrangements for course work or exams
- Academic Support can also help with exam and timetable arrangements and practical support
- There are various organisations providing advice, information and support and there is useful information on the internet and in self-help books. Some suggestions are listed at the end of this leaflet.

How can you help someone else?

- Really listening, without interrupting and without trying to offer solutions, is often enough.
- Allow the person to express him or herself. He or she may want to cry or to be angry. This may feel very uncomfortable for you, but try not to distract him or her with forced cheerfulness.
- Ask the person what he or she finds helpful and respect his or her wishes, if this is possible.
- The person may initially reject your offer of help and may seem to be coping well. It often takes time for the effects of loss to hit home, so do not be put off from offering your support again at a later date.
- Loss can take a long time to heal and the immediate rush of attention may quickly fade away, leaving the person feeling abandoned. Small acts of support, sustained over a longer period, may be helpful.
- If the person seems to be stuck in his or her grief, or if you are concerned, you may want to encourage him or her to seek help.
- If the person is talking about suicide, either directly or in vague terms, take it seriously and encourage them to see their GP. If this is not possible, speak to someone who can intervene. This may be a member of staff in your hall or your Department or School. Cripps Health Centre will provide advice or visit if necessary. You can also take your friend to the Emergency Department at Queen's Medical Centre.

When is specialist help appropriate ?

GRIEF IS A NATURAL PROCESS AND PEOPLE HAVE TREMENDOUS INNER RESOURCES, WHICH HELP THEM TO COPE WITH LOSS AND DEATH EVEN IN TRAUMATIC CIRCUMSTANCES. MOST PEOPLE GET THROUGH WITH THE SUPPORT OF FRIENDS AND FAMILY. YOUR PERSONAL TUTOR OR HALL TUTOR MAY BE HELPFUL.

However, you may be away from home or not want to worry people you know or you may feel they can't understand. Perhaps you would simply prefer to talk to someone who is not involved.

Occasionally, the grieving process gets stuck and you find you cannot feel anything at all. Maybe the loss rekindles past hurts. You may continue to be intensely distressed long after the event, or continue to have problems with sleeping, with work or relationships, with alcohol or drugs. You might find that you are thinking of suicide as a way out. In these situations, you need to find some help.

There are resources at the University and in Nottingham, where you will find information, advice, support and treatment. The resources listed in this leaflet will help you to consider what approach might best suit you and assist you in contacting the appropriate service.

Initially, if you prefer to approach someone you know, your personal tutor, hall tutor or any member of staff can put you in touch with more specialist services.

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

The University Counselling Service offers free, confidential counselling, group therapy and workshops to undergraduate and postgraduate students and to University staff. The Service also offers support to those concerned about the welfare of a friend, housemate, relative or colleague. Counselling is available at University Park, Sutton Bonington, Jubilee and some School of Nursing and Midwifery Centres.



To arrange an initial appointment, telephone **0115 951 3695**, or e-mail counselling.service@nottingham.ac.uk or call in to room **A75 Trent Building, University Park**. Visit the web site at www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling/ for further information and useful self-help links.

- **Your GP** can offer you support, advice, referral to specialist help or medical treatment. If you are registered with **Cripps Health Centre**, telephone **0115 846 8888** (internal extension 75). Out of hours calls will be referred to Nottingham Emergency Medical Services.
- **Academic Support** offers advice, practical help and support to individual students experiencing study problems, in addition to assisting students with dyslexia or a disability. They also offer a range of workshops and groups throughout the academic year.

For details, visit their website at www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicssupport, or contact them at **Student Services Centre, Portland Building**, telephone **0115 951 3710**.
- Each School appoints a **Disability Liaison Officer (DLO)** to provide advice and guidance for students and members of staff, about disability issues and to offer support. For further information, visit the web site at www.nottingham.ac.uk/disability/disliaison
- **The chaplains** offer spiritual and emotional support and guidance, to students and staff of all faiths, or none. Contact the chaplains in the **Portland Building, University Park** or telephone **0115 951 3931**
- **The Students' Union welfare officer** and the welfare reps in hall offer advice and support. Contact them through the **Student Advice and Representation Centre** in the **Portland Building**, telephone **0115 846 8730**.
- **Nightline**, telephone **0115 951 4985** offers a confidential telephone listening service, run by students for students which is available from 7pm-8am every night during term-time.

LOCAL AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

- **The Samaritans** offer a listening ear 24 hours a day. Telephone **08457 90 90 90** (calls charged at local rate).
- **Nottingham CRUSE**, telephone **0115 924 4404**, offers bereavement counselling and support by trained volunteers.
- **Nottingham Counselling Service**, 32 Heathcote Street, Hockley, Nottingham, telephone **0115 950 1743**, offers confidential, subsidised counselling to any individual over 20 years.
- **Speakeasy at Connexions**, 24-32 Carlton Street, Hockley, Nottingham, telephone **0115 992 6102**, offers free counselling, information and support for young people aged between 13 and 25.

