



**University of  
Nottingham**  
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**University Counselling Service**

# **Coping with Loss and Bereavement**

## **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 and 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 aesthetic 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- Become withdrawn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 alone?” “Why me?” This can be very difficult for a 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 the 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.

## **If you have experienced a loss of 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 on 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 ways 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, or to just be there. People often don't know what to say or do and they may be glad to just have some guidance.
- Accept that you will be in emotional turmoil and don't make any major decisions about moving away, giving up on your course or ending a relationship while you are not quite yourself.
- Let your personal tutor, 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 some 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 department or school. Cripps Health Centre will provide advice or visit if necessary. You can also take our friend to the Emergency Department at Queens 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 with someone who is not involved.

Occasionally, the grieving process gets stuck and you find that you cannot feel anything at all. Maybe the loss rekindles past hurt. You may continue to be intensely distressed after the event, or continue to have problems with sleeping, with work or relationships, with alcohol and drugs. You might find that you are thinking of suicide as a way out. In these situations, you may 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 undergraduates, postgraduate students and 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 campus and the Derby Medical School.

To arrange an initial appointment

1. Visit the web site at [www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling) and complete the registration form.
  2. Then telephone the Counselling appointment line on 0115 748 6344 or call into The Orchards, Building 6 on University Park.
- **Your GP** can offer you support, advice, referral to specialist help or medical treatment. If you are registered at Cripps Health Centre telephone 0115 846 8888. Out of hours calls will be referred to Nottingham Emergency Medical Services.
  - **Academic Support** offer advice, practical help and support to individual students experiencing study issues, in addition to assisting students with dyslexia or a disability. They also offer a range of workshops and groups throughout the academic year. [www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicsupport](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicsupport) or contact your local Student Services Centre [www.nottingham.ac.uk/student-services](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/student-services)
  - 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: <https://bit.ly/3aF6oWS>
  - **The Chaplains** offer spiritual and emotional support and guidance, to students and staff of all faiths or none. Contact the chaplains on University Park, Jubilee or Sutton Bonington <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/chaplaincy> 0115 951 3931
  - **The Students Union Advice** can help students with information, advice and representation around all aspects of student welfare and education such as financial housing and course issues [www.SUAdvice@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:www.SUAdvice@nottingham.ac.uk) 0115 846 8730 Portland Building C Floor.

- **Nightline**, is a student-run service providing confidential listening and information. Is it a non-advisory service. 7pm – 8am every night during term time. 0115 951 4985 [www.nightlineanon@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:www.nightlineanon@nottingham.ac.uk)

## Local and National Resources

- **The Emergency Department** at Queens Medical Centre is available 24 hours for medical assessment and treatment.
- **The Samaritans** – 24 hours a day 365 days a year call 116 123
- **Nottingham Counselling Centre** – Unit 5, Victoria Court, Kent Street, Nottm, NG1 3LZ – 0115 950 1743 – 9-8 Mon – Thurs 9 -4 Fri BACP registered counsellors.
- **CRUSE – Nottingham bereavement Care** – 0115 924 4404 – Room 26, Lenton Business centre, Nottm, NG7 2BY  
[www.nottinghamshire@cruse.org.uk](mailto:www.nottinghamshire@cruse.org.uk) offers support to those who are grieving, following the death of someone close. **The Samaritans** – 24 hours a day 365 days a year call 116 123