

Bereavement Friendship & Support

The Hexagon, Broad Street, Eye
Second Sunday Of Each Month 2-4pm

2024 Dates

14th January

11th February

10th March

14th April

19th May (note 3rd Sunday)

9th June

14th July

11th August

8th September

13th October

10th November

*Have you experienced a
bereavement and
wish to talk about it?*

Free of Charge

Free Ample Parking

Non-Denominational

**Co-ordinator
to greet you**

Free Refreshments

Conversation

Encouragement

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For more information or to book your place, please call:

01379 851253 or 01379 871168

Or walk in to your local Susan Whymark Funeral Service office

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Eye, IP23 7HU

Support Group Session 1

What is Grief?

Grief is the natural human response to loss

It's the emotional suffering we feel when someone we love is taken away.

The more significant the loss, the more intense the grief will be. We mostly associate grief with loss following a death but it can be due to

Divorce or relationship break up

Loss of health

Loss of job

Loss of financial stability

A miscarriage

Retirement

Loss of a pet

Loss of a dream

A loved one becoming ill

Loss of friendship

Loss of safety after a trauma

Selling a family home.

The list is endless but all hinges on something that we love being taken away.

I'm going to go through what's sometimes referred to as "the 5 stages of grief". While I'm going through them if you want to make any comments or ask any questions, I'll try and answer as best I can.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, was Swiss Psychiatrist, who noticed there appeared to be pattern to grief in terminally ill patients, but these stages can be seen in those dealing with grief caused by any loss. She also noted later that these stages are not sequential meaning you dip in and out of each one.

I also want to say while it can be helpful to identify with the stages, it may be that you haven't or don't go through any of them. Everyone will grieve differently because we are all unique and everyone's loss is unique to them.

Denial - The first reaction is denial. In this stage we believe the loss is somehow mistaken, and cling to a false, rather than reality.

It helps us to survive the loss. In this stage, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense. We are in a state of shock and denial. We go numb. We wonder how we can go on, if we can go on, why we should go on.

We try to find a way to simply get through each day. Denial and shock help us to cope and make survival possible. Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief. There is a grace in denial. It is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle.

As we accept the reality of the loss and start to ask yourself questions, you are unknowingly beginning the healing process. You are becoming stronger, and the denial is beginning to fade. But as you proceed, all the feelings you were denying begin to surface.

Anger – When we recognize that denial cannot continue, we become frustrated, especially at certain individuals, a doctor, the hospital, the car driver, someone who didn't come to the funeral, or who crossed the street rather than speak to you. Certain things we may say or think would be: "Why me? It's not fair!"; "How can this happen to me?"; "Who is to blame?"; "Why would this happen?".

Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process. Be willing to feel your anger, even though it may seem endless. The more you truly feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate and the more you will heal. There are many other emotions under the anger and you will get to them in time, but anger is the emotion we are most used to managing. The truth is that anger has no limits

Underneath anger is pain, your pain. It is natural to feel deserted and abandoned, but we live in a society that fears anger. Anger is strength and it can be an anchor, giving temporary structure to the nothingness of loss. At first grief feels like being lost at sea: no connection to anything.

Suddenly you have a structure — your anger toward them. It is something to hold onto; and a connection made from the strength of anger and feels better than nothing.

We usually know more about suppressing anger than feeling it. The anger is just another indication of the degree of your loss.

Bargaining – The third stage involves the hope that we can avoid a cause of grief. Usually, the negotiation for an extended life is made in exchange for a reformed lifestyle. For instance: "I'd give anything to have him back." Or: "If only he'd come back to life, I'd promise to be a better person!"

If you knew the loss was coming, it seems like you will do anything if only your loved one would be spared. "I will never be angry at my wife again if you'll just let her live." After a loss, bargaining may take the form of a temporary truce. "What if I devote the rest of my life to helping others. Then can I wake up and realize this has all been a bad dream?"

We become lost in a maze of "If only..." or "What if..." statements. We want life returned to what it was; we want our loved one restored. We want to go back in time: find the tumor sooner, recognize the illness more quickly, stop the accident from happening...if only, if only, if only.

Guilt is often bargaining's companion. The "if onlys" cause us to find fault in ourselves and what we "think" we could have done differently. We may even bargain with the pain. We will do anything not to feel the pain of this loss.

We remain in the past, trying to negotiate our way out of the hurt. People often think of the stages as lasting weeks or months. They forget that the stages are responses to feelings that can last for minutes or hours as we flip in and out of one and then another.

Depression – After bargaining, our attention moves squarely into the present.

Empty feelings present themselves, and grief enters our lives on a deeper level, deeper than we ever imagined.

This depressive stage feels as though it will last forever. It's important to understand that this depression is not a sign of mental illness. It is the appropriate response to a great loss (You are not going mad)

We withdraw from life, left in a fog of intense sadness, wondering, perhaps, if there is any point in going on alone? Why go on at all? Depression after a loss is too often seen as unnatural: a state to be fixed, something to snap out of.

The first question to ask yourself is whether or not the situation you're in is actually depressing. The loss of a loved one is a very depressing situation, and depression is a normal and appropriate response. To not experience depression after a loved one dies would be unusual.

When a loss fully settles in your soul, the realization that your loved one didn't get better this time and is not coming back is understandably depressing.

If grief is a process of healing, then depression is one of the many necessary steps along the way.

Acceptance – Acceptance is often confused with the notion of being "all right" or "OK" with what has happened. This is not the case. Most people don't ever feel OK or all right about the loss of a loved one. This stage is about accepting the reality that our loved one is physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality.

We will never like this reality or make it OK, but eventually we accept it. We learn to live with it. It is the new normal with which we must learn to live.

We must try to live now in a world where our loved one is missing. In resisting this new normal, at first many people want to maintain life as it was before a loved one died.

Through bits and pieces of acceptance, we see that we cannot maintain the past intact. It has been forever changed and we must readjust. We must learn to reorganize roles, re-assign them to others or take them on ourselves.

Finding acceptance may be just having more good days than bad ones. As we begin to live again and enjoy our life, we often feel that in doing so, we are betraying our loved one.

We can never replace what has been lost, but we can make new connections and new meaningful relationships.

Instead of denying our feelings, we listen to our needs; we move, we change, we grow, we evolve. We may start to reach out to others and become involved in their lives. We invest in our friendships and in our relationship with ourselves. We begin to live again, but we cannot do so until we have given grief its time.

1.

Guilt is a normal response to the perception that we've somehow failed in our duties and obligations or that we've done something wrong. It generates a jumbled mixture of feelings including doubt, shame, inadequacy, insecurity, failure, unworthiness, self judgment and blame, anxiety and fear of punishment.

When your loved one's terminal illness was finally diagnosed, as a caregiver you may feel guilty that you hadn't noticed symptoms sooner, waited too long to seek treatment or didn't do enough to comfort your beloved. If death came suddenly or unexpectedly, you may feel guilty for not being present when it happened. If it came after a long, lingering illness, you may feel guilty for feeling relieved that your loved one's suffering is over and you're now free from the burden of worry and care. You may feel guilty that you are the one who survived, or uncomfortable that you received an insurance settlement or inheritance following the death of your loved one. If you're a religious person, you may feel guilty that you feel so **angry at God**.

Unfortunately, ***guilt is a natural and common component of grief.*** When someone you love dies, it's only human to search for an explanation, to look at what you did or did not do, to dwell on the what if's and if only's. You agonize and tell yourself, "If only I'd done something differently, this never would've happened." Sometimes, though, there simply isn't anything you could have done differently. When your loved one's illness or death occurred, chances are that whatever happened beforehand was not intentional on your part. In the wise words of internationally known author and publisher Louise Hay, *we do the best we can with our understanding at the time, and when we know better, we do better.* Given the stress you were under at the time and how exhausted you may have been, you were doing the best you could. You were basing whatever you did on what you knew, given the information available to you then.

Harsh as it may seem, consider that even if you had done things differently, your loved one still could have died in some other way at some other time! Sometimes ***we act as if we can control the random hazards of existence***, even when we know that death is a fact of life.

Guilt is driven by our own personal beliefs and expectations, and dealing with it requires that we examine what we think we did wrong, face it and evaluate it as objectively as possible. For example, what did you expect of yourself that you did not live up to? Were your expectations unrealistic?

If they were, then you need to let go of them. Since you did all that you were capable of doing at the time, there simply is no basis for your guilt, and you need to let go of that as well.

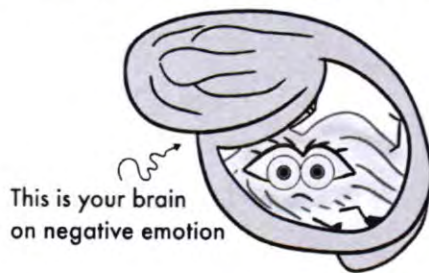
Nevertheless, if after careful examination of the facts, you find that your expectations of yourself are legitimate and you still did not live up to them, it's important to face and take responsibility for what you believe you could have done differently. ***Healthy guilt allows us to own up to and learn from our mistakes.*** It gives us a chance to make amends, to do things differently next time, to come to a better understanding of ourselves, to forgive ourselves and move on.

Tips for Coping with Guilt

- ***Identify what it is that you feel guilty about.*** Resist the urge to keep such thoughts and feelings to yourself like so many deep, dark secrets. Bring them out into the open where they can be examined. Share them with a trusted friend or counselor, who can view your thoughts and feelings more objectively, and challenge what may be irrational or illogical.
- ***Listen to the messages you give yourself*** (the should haves, could haves and if only's), and realize the past is something you can do absolutely nothing about.
- ***When guilty thoughts come to mind,*** disrupt them by telling yourself to stop thinking such thoughts. Say "STOP!" firmly, and out loud if you need to.
- ***Live the next day or next week of your life as if you were guilt-free,*** knowing you can return to your guilt feelings any time you wish. Pick a start time, and stop yourself whenever you make any guilt-related statements.
- ***Write down your guilt-related statements,*** set a date, and pledge that from that day forward, you won't say them to yourself anymore. Post them and read them every day.
- ***If you are troubled by feeling relieved that your loved one's suffering has ended,*** know that a heavy burden has been lifted from your shoulders; you have been released from an emotionally exhausting and physically draining experience, and to feel relieved is certainly understandable.

- ***If you believe in God or a higher power***, consider what He or She has to say about forgiveness.
- ***Participate in a support group*** — it's a powerful way to obtain forgiveness and absolution from others.
- ***Be your own best friend***. What would you have said to your best friend if this had happened to that person? Can you say the same to yourself?
- ***Remember the good things you did in your relationship with your loved one*** and all the loving care you gave. Focus on the positive aspects: what you learned from each other, what you did together that brought you joy, laughter and excitement. Write those things down, hold onto them and read them whenever you need to.
- ***Ask what you expected of yourself*** that you didn't live up to. How is it that you didn't? What were the circumstances at the time? What have you learned from this that you'll do differently next time?
- ***What can you do to make amends?*** Find a way to genuinely apologize to your loved one's spirit and ask for forgiveness.
- ***Have a visit with your loved one***. Say aloud or in your mind whatever you didn't get to say while your loved one was still living. Be as honest as you can be.
- ***Have your loved one write a letter to you***. What would this person say to you about the guilt and sadness you've been carrying around?
- ***Ask what it would take for you to forgive yourself***. Can you begin doing it? Say out loud to yourself, "I forgive you." Say it several times a day.
- ***Remember that no one else can absolve your feelings of guilt***—only you can do so, through the process of intentionally forgiving yourself.
- ***When you've consciously learned all you can learn from this situation***, and when you've made any amends you consider necessary, then it's time to let go of your guilt, to forgive yourself, and to move on.
- ***Channel the energy of your guilt*** into a worthwhile project. Do good deeds in your loved one's honor.

Keeping Negative Emotions in Check



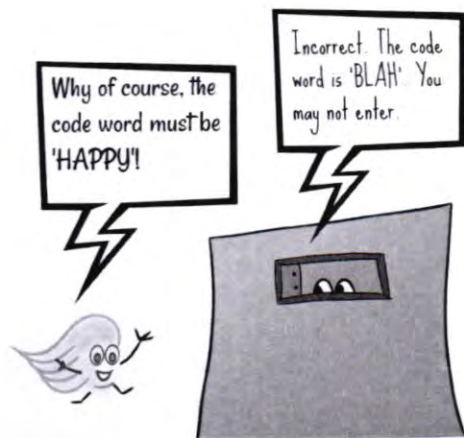
These are negative emotions. All human beings are familiar with these creatures, but as someone who is grieving, I'll bet you've recently come into contact with a



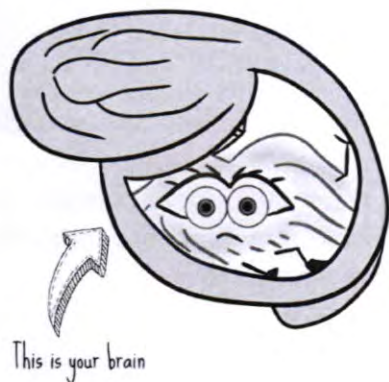
particularly intense breed. Even though your negative emotions may look and sound a little different, they all share the singular desire to take up as much as space in your life as you will allow. They feed on attention and they are relentless in their efforts to get it from you. They create a lot of noise in your life, overshadowing other emotions, and convincing you that it's very important for you to pay attention to them OR



ELSE. Sometimes people are especially susceptible to negative emotions, for example when experiences like grief, trauma, and psychological disorder are present. These experiences contribute to the narrowing of a person's focus and can cause them to be more open to negative emotions, thoughts, and experiences than positive. Pretty soon, they may find themselves shutting positive emotion out altogether, like the bouncer at a very sad and unpleasant nightclub.



When negative emotions are given too much space and attention they can wreak havoc on your thinking; confirming negative beliefs, clouding your worldview, and negatively biasing your opinion of yourself and others. Negative emotions grow and multiply until one day you find there isn't room for anything else. This is usually right about the time you decide there's no reason to get out of bed and put on clothes in the morning.



The problem:

Before going any further I want to ask you to identify the emotions are you experiencing right now. You don't have to pick just one emotion, actually, I would prefer for you to consider the range of emotions you're experiencing in this moment. If you're sitting at your desk with a writing utensil and a piece of scrap paper handy, write these emotions down. Now I want you to ask yourself – *do I view these emotions as all positive, all negative, or a mix of both?*

My hope is that you will say a mix of both, which may seem odd considering "all positive" was an option. But I actually don't believe that "all positive" is a lofty aspiration, especially considering most people reading this have experienced the death of a loved one. Emotions that are typically considered "negative", like pain, longing, yearning, and sadness are inherent in loving someone who has died. One must learn to tolerate these emotions in order to maintain a connection the deceased. Some may even go so far as to say they value these emotions because they serve as a reminder that their loved one is irreplaceable and their absence will never cease to be heartbreaking.

As counterintuitive as it may seem to some, the problem is not the existence of negative emotion, rather it's with keeping negative emotions in check. Problems exist

when a person allows negative emotions to take up *so much space* that positive emotions, thoughts, and experiences no longer have room to survive. You need to reserve some space, even if it is a very little corner of your mind, where positive experiences can exist.

For example, the other day I took a minute to identify the emotions I was experiencing, just as I asked you to do above. I realized I felt stressed out and anxious and typically my response to stress and anxiety is to feel paralyzed (i.e. the stay in bed, no pants scenario). I was wondering why I didn't feel worse in that moment when I realized it's because I *also simultaneously* felt hopeful. Hope was the key because it balanced the emotional scales and gave me a reason to keep trying.



Creating space for positive emotion:

In creating space for positive emotion, one shouldn't strive to eliminate negative emotion. Rather the goal should be two fold in that a person should attempt to (1) effectively cope with negative emotion so it doesn't take over and (2) give positive emotion, memory, and experiences some time and attention. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Learn to tolerate negative emotion: Experiences like sadness, guilt, anger, and anxiety will always exist, especially after the death of a loved one. Many people will instinctually try to run away from or escape these distressing experiences, but avoidance usually only makes things worse. These emotions will always be there cropping up when you least expect it. If you try and eliminate negative emotion you will quickly find yourself so consumed with the job of playing emotional whack-a-mole that you cut yourself off from everything else. For more on avoidance in grief, [head here](#).

2. Indulge negative emotion a little bit less: Just because negative emotion wants all your time and attention, doesn't mean you have to give it to them. Negative emotions are kind of like naughty children, if you allow them to be in control and indulge their every demand, they will run amok. Negative emotions need boundaries and they need to be told no once in a while.



3. Do things to enhance well-being and positive emotion: In a recent post, [*A Balanced Approach to Coping With Life After Loss*](#), we discuss our approach to coping which asserts that while it's important to find ways to cope with the thoughts, experiences, and emotions directly related to your loss, it's also equally important to engage in coping that promotes adjustment and overall well-being. Our rationale is that the better you feel, the more strength you'll have for dealing with grief. Check out a more thorough discussion on well-being at the link above.

4. Make room for positive memories and a continued bond with your loved one: People sometimes shy away from nurturing a continued bond with their deceased loved one because they fear negative emotion or because society makes them feel as though they ought to leave their loved one in the past. Although memories of your loved one may always be tinged with sadness, in time positive memories and an ongoing bond with your loved one can be an important source of hope, inspiration, strength, and positive emotion.

Elephant in the Room by Terry Kettering

There's an elephant in the room.

It is large and squatting, so it is hard to get around it.

Yet we squeeze by with, "How are you?" and "I'm fine," and a
thousand other forms of trivial chatter.

We talk about the weather.

We talk about work.

We talk about everything else, except the elephant in the room.

There's an elephant in the room.

We all know it's there.

We are thinking about the elephant as we talk together.

It is constantly on our minds.

For, you see, it is a very large elephant.

It has hurt us all. But we don't talk about the elephant in the room.

Oh, please say their name.

Oh, please say their name again.

Oh, please, let's talk about the elephant in the room.

For if we talk about their death, perhaps we can talk about their
life.

Can I say their name to you and not have you look away?

For if I cannot, then you are leaving me alone

in a room

with an elephant.

