

# Bereavement

Moodjuice Self-help Guide



**Learn more about  
bereavement and skills  
to cope with it.**

## **Self Help for Bereavement**

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- Are you finding it difficult to cope following a bereavement?
- Have you lost a loved one and find that you think about them all the time?
- Does a past loss still cause you significant emotional distress?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes', you may be experiencing symptoms of grief, and you may find this guide helpful.

This guide aims to help you to:

- Recognise whether you may be experiencing symptoms of grief.
- Understand what grief is, what complicates it and what keeps it going.
- Find ways to understand, manage or cope with your grief.

## **Contents of this self help guide**

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Strategies that you could use to cope with your grief:

1. Understand more about loss, separation and bereavement
2. Learning strategies to help you stay active and make good use of your time.
3. Consider making positive changes to your lifestyle.

When going through this booklet it might be helpful to try out each strategy one at a time, rather than trying to learn them all at once. However, simply take things at your own pace.

## What are the signs of grief?

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If you experience a bereavement then it is likely that you will recognise many of the feelings, physical sensations, thoughts and behaviour patterns described below.



### Feelings

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Loss / Grief  
Emotionally numb  
Sad / Tearful  
Overwhelmed / Helpless  
Worried



### Physical Sensations

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Tired / Exhausted  
Loss of appetite  
Lacking energy  
Poor concentration  
Disturbed sleep pattern



### Thoughts

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I wish I had them back with me  
I will miss them terribly  
What am I going to do now?  
If only I had a bit more time



### Behaviour Patterns

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Withdrawing from social contact  
Talking about the loss a long time after  
Repeatedly putting off practical arrangements  
Not talking about the loss to anyone  
Avoiding things relating to the loss

The list above represents some of the common experiences of people who have been bereaved. Grief is a normal but challenging process that can settle over time. By following the steps in this guide, you may learn helpful strategies to cope with your situation.

## **What is grief?**

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Grief is a feeling that you might have following the loss of a loved one. It can be difficult and stressful. Nearly everyone goes through it at some point in their life. It will take time to process emotions and adjust to coping without that person in your life. It is important to take time to grieve.

It can be very difficult to predict or fully appreciate the impact of a loss. To begin with, you may experience shock and disbelief. It is also common to feel emotionally numb for some time after. Everyone copes with grief in different ways. Some people cry a lot or talk to friends, others will deal with things quietly, by themselves. A person may cope well with their experience of grief, or find it difficult to manage. It might only take a short while for your mood to settle. Then again, it might take a lot longer than that to get back on track. The strongest emotions will gradually reduce in intensity and frequency over time.



You might come across obstacles to the grieving process. This can make it more difficult to process and deal with. For example, if you have children to look after who are also grieving, or if you have unresolved feelings that relate to your loss.

You might not realise at the time, but you might be coping with your loss in a normal way. That is, the same way as someone else would, if faced with a similar situation.

## **What makes grief so difficult?**

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### *Life Events:*

There may be lots of demands on your time as you try to cope with your loss. For example, you may have practical issues to deal with. This can include registering the death and sorting out the person's possessions and property which can be distressing. All of this can make it harder to cope or understand what you need to do. Also, your role and responsibilities within your family may have suddenly changed.

### *Difficult Thoughts:*

Some people can cope well with difficulties, whilst others find it very hard to manage. Some people feel angry or guilty following a loss. You might think that you could have done more or feel in some way responsible for what happened. It is also common to feel quite low and vulnerable at such times. The situation might also remind you of other sad feelings, memories or past experiences. You may find that you think more negatively about yourself, the future and other people. It is important that you recognise such unhelpful thoughts in order to cope more effectively.

### *Actions:*

You may find that you begin to avoid places or situations that remind you of your loss. On the other hand, it might be difficult to concentrate on anything else. A significant loss can sometimes trigger a change in the way that you relate to other people. It can be really difficult to talk about the person who died, and your experience of loss.

The anniversary of a loss, and significant events spent without the person may also be hard. You may find that doing something special to mark these occasions can help. You might also consider having a keepsake or memory box.

In reality it is likely that a combination of all these factors influence someone's experience of bereavement.

## What makes grief harder to cope with?

The context and circumstances in which your bereavement took place can effect how easy or difficult it is to deal with grief and loss. For example:

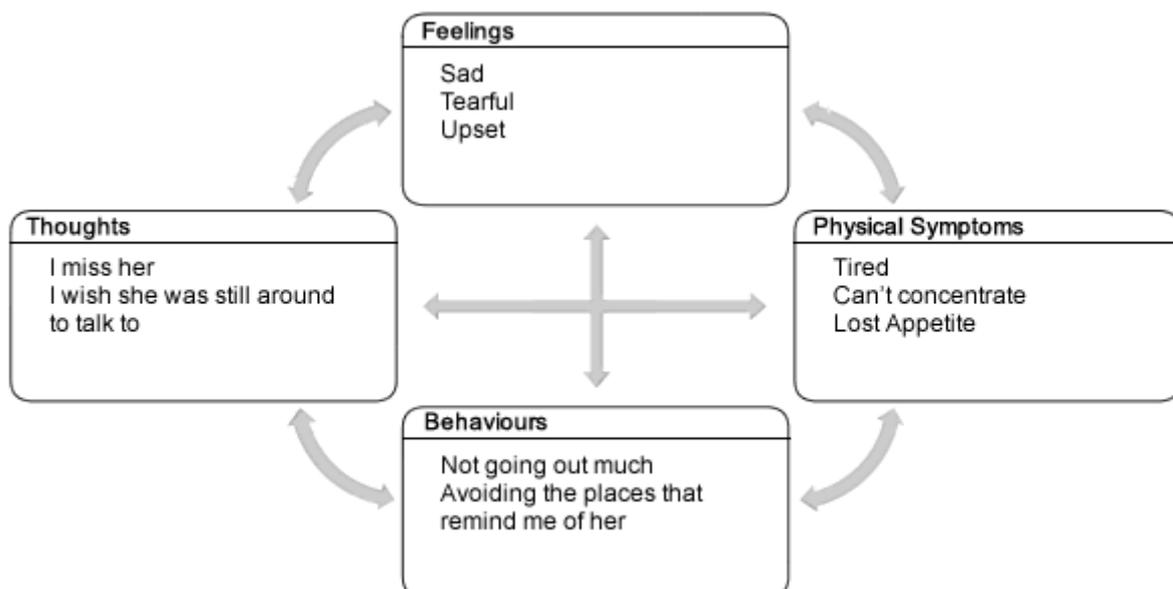
- How long you knew the person
- How old they were
- What relationship you shared
- How the person died
- Whether the death was expected or unexpected
- Your past experience of loss
- Experiencing multiple losses

A sudden and unexpected death of a young relative may be very difficult to cope with. You might react differently to the death of someone you didn't know well.

Avoiding a lot of activities, places or social contact can maintain your grief and low mood. You may find it helpful to aim for a more structured and active lifestyle. Having support from friends can be really helpful.

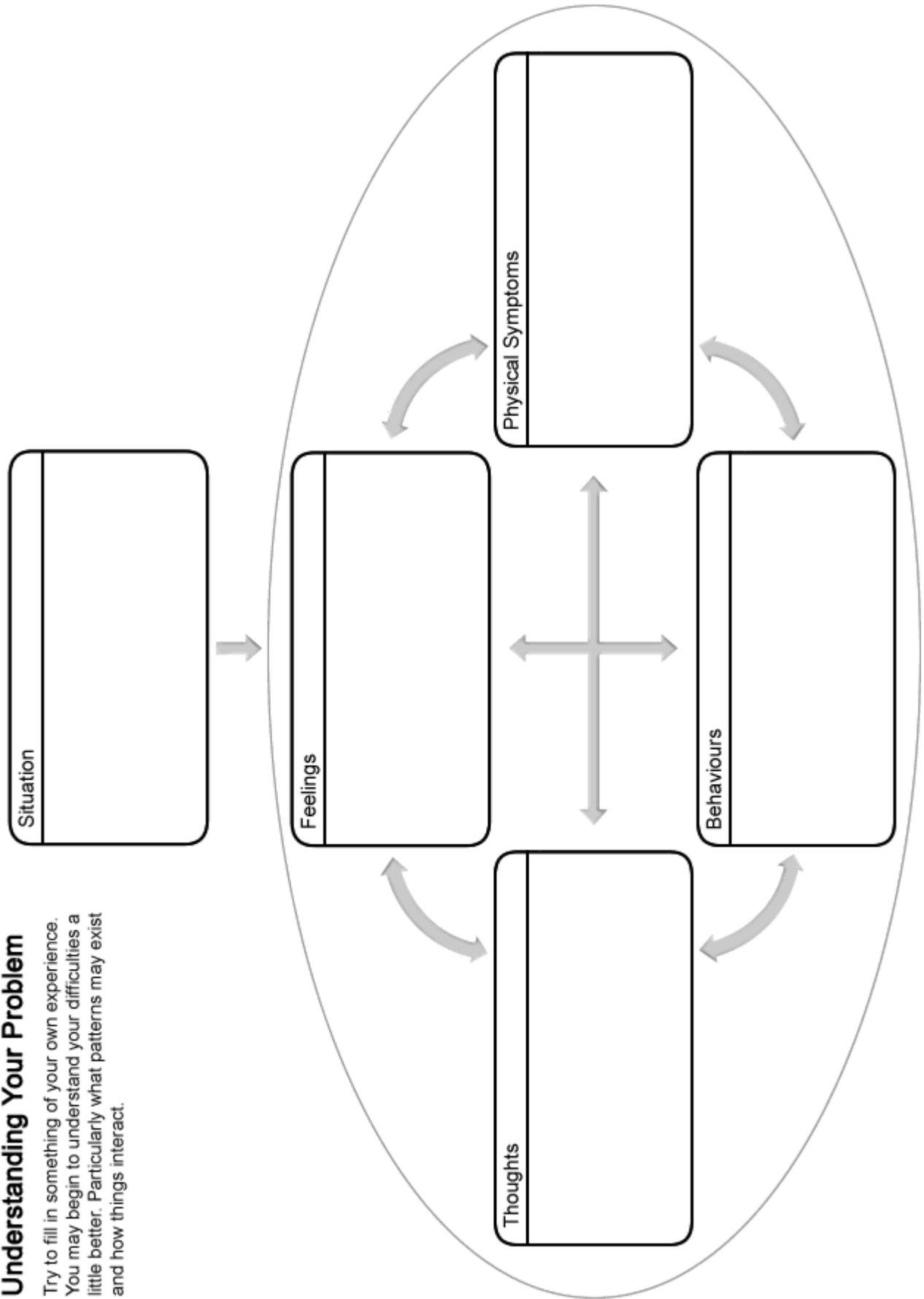
## Understanding your grief

Have a look at some of the examples and try to fill in something of your experience. See if you can recognise a similar pattern occurring within yourself.



### Understanding Your Problem

Try to fill in something of your own experience. You may begin to understand your difficulties a little better. Particularly what patterns may exist and how things interact.



### **How have you been coping so far?**

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You may have been dealing with at least some of these difficulties for a while already. Think about what you have done so far to cope, and how effective these strategies have been.

- Will it be helpful in the long-term, or is it possible that they might be keeping your difficulties going?
- Think about how you might have coped well with difficulties in the past.
- What is going well currently and what you are doing to achieve that?
- What coping strategies and support do you have available to you? Could you be making better use of these?
  - Social support - speaking to people; family, friends, relatives, colleagues, etc.
  - Confidence - being sure of your own ability to cope.
  - Self-awareness - knowing how this problem affects you; your body, thoughts, feelings and behaviours.
  - Looking after yourself - making sure that you have some time to yourself. For example going for walks, having a relaxing bath, etc.

## **Making Good Use of Your Time**

When we feel we have experienced a recent loss, our motivation to do things often decreases. You may find that you give up hobbies or activities that you previously enjoyed. Over time you might end up doing very little. This can lead you to feel even lower and a cycle can begin which is difficult to escape from.

By using a diary to plan your week in advance, you may be able to do more of the things you want to, in addition to the things that you have to do. This can really help to lift your mood. This section aims to give you advice that will help you to plan your weeks well.

When completing your diary, start by filling in all the activities that you have to do. For example, preparing meals, doing housework, attending appointments, etc. This will show you all the time that you have free. Then you can begin to plan other activities that you would like to do.

Remember to pace yourself. Give yourself space to be busy or take time out to relax. You may find it helpful to plan in some time for:



- Socialising - social contact often helps us feel better, even though you may not feel like it at times.
- Hobbies and interests - this might be something you have enjoyed in the past, or a new project.
- Exercise - this can improve your mood and general health. It doesn't need to be anything too energetic. Just going for a walk regularly can be a good option.
- Bedtimes - try to plan regular and consistent bedtimes. Having a regular sleeping pattern can help improve your mood and energy levels.
- Time for yourself - make time to relax and give yourself space between activities.

Some ideas have been provided in the box below that may help you get started. We all have different interests, so try to do things that you know will work for you. Fill in your ideas in the space provided:

Suggestions	Your Ideas
Visit a friend Go to the cinema Do something active (take the dog for a walk; housework) Take part in a hobby or sport Treat yourself (e.g. buy something nice) Do something creative (e.g. draw; paint etc) Watch a movie Read a book Visit a relative	

Now try to complete a plan for a week. You don't have to fill in every space - this can be quite difficult. You could start by just adding in one or two new activities for each day.

Once you have filled in your diary, all you have to do is try to follow your plan each day. Don't worry if unexpected things come up and you cannot stick to it exactly. In fact, it is very unlikely that things will go exactly as you planned. It is also fine to be flexible and replace some activities with new ones. Leave out some tasks altogether if you don't have time for them. Try to be relaxed if this happens.

**Activity Diary**

Try to plan activities to fill your week. This can help you to make good use of your time.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breakfast							
Morning							
Morning							
Lunch							
Afternoon							
Afternoon							
Dinner							
Evening							
Bedtime							

## Looking After Yourself

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Taking steps towards a healthy lifestyle can have a real impact on our mood and ability to cope. On the other hand, unhealthy habits can put your health, or the health of others, at risk. It can be a real challenge to overcome some habits or behaviours. Focusing on the benefits of positive change may boost your motivation.



### Alcohol

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Alcohol can impact your ability to cope and control behaviours. This can be unhelpful if you are trying to overcome problems with anger or anxiety. It can also interfere with your mood, and the quality of your sleep. You might think that consuming alcohol would help you sleep. In fact, as your body processes alcohol overnight it can wake you up. Some people use the numbing effect of alcohol to avoid thinking about or facing problems. Unfortunately, this approach can be damaging and make things worse. Drinking a lot and often can lead to a pattern of addictive substance misuse.



### Drugs

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Many drugs have a sedative or stimulant effect on the body which can have an impact on your sleep and mood. Some people use recreational drugs as a distraction, to avoid thinking about or facing problems. Using such substances can be damaging and make things worse. Developing a habit of regular or increasing use can lead to a pattern of addictive substance misuse.



### Smoking

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The content of cigarette smoke and nicotine replacements act as a stimulant. This can have an impact on your sleep and your mood. Some people say that smoking helps them to cope with stress. Smoking is known to have a negative impact on long-term physical health.



### Caffeine

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Caffeine can trigger a reaction that is similar to the symptoms of anxiety. It can also reduce the quality of sleep. It is best not to have anything caffeinated within four hours of bedtime. Coffee, tea, hot chocolate, energy drinks, and some fizzy drinks contain caffeine.

By cutting down or stopping your consumption of potentially harmful substances, you are taking steps towards a healthier lifestyle.



### **Relationships / Social Network**

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Good relationships and support from friends and family can really help us cope better. It can also mean that we overcome problems more quickly and for longer. It can be really helpful to talk through difficulties with friends. You could discuss ways of coping, and some of them might have been through something similar.



### **Healthy Eating**

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What you eat and drink can have a significant impact on both your mood, sleep and physical health. Consider making changes towards having a balanced, nutritious diet. Try to eat regular meals and stay hydrated. Avoid unhealthy food that contains a lot of fat or sugar. Also, consider what you eat and drink close to bedtime. Caffeine, alcohol or a large meal can interfere with your sleep.



### **Exercise**

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Keeping fit and active can improve your physical health, mood and ability to cope with problems. Try to get at least some gentle exercise each week. You could try going for a walk, doing the garden or housework, playing sport or joining an exercise class. While exercise can also help us sleep, try not to be too active close to bedtime as this can keep you awake.



### **Routine**

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Having a consistent routine can help give structure to your life. Patterns can be set as we react the same way or do the same thing in certain situations. Our body can begin to expect and follow such routines. For example, taking time to relax and unwind before bed, and getting up at the same time.



### **Surroundings**

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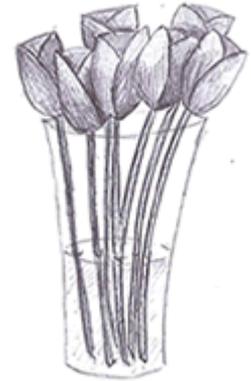
Notice the impact of your environment on your mood. Consider the noise, temperature and light that you have to deal with. Your comfort and the tidiness of your surroundings can all have an impact on your mood. It can also affect your sleep and your overall ability to cope with problems. Try to take practical steps to resolve any particular issues.

Now you have some ideas to inspire healthy changes to your lifestyle, why not try them out? You could ask a friend for support. If you build them into your daily routine they won't seem like such a chore. Before long you might forget you ever did anything different!

## Final Word

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We hope that you found some of the ideas in this booklet useful. You can continue to use the techniques you found helpful long into the future and they should continue to benefit you. If some of the ideas are not particularly helpful at first, it is perhaps worth sticking with them for a few weeks to give them a chance to work. If however you feel your situation remains largely unchanged or if you did not find this booklet useful, you should speak to your GP who can tell you about the other options available which you could find helpful.



This self help guide was written by James Hardie (Clinical Associate in Applied Psychology).

## Further Information and Resources

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For further information and self-help resources go to Moodjuice online:

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk>

Moodjuice is a website designed to offer information and advice to those experiencing troublesome thoughts, feelings and behaviours. In the site you can explore various aspects of your life that may be causing you distress and obtain information that will allow you to help yourself. This includes details of organisations, services and other resources that can offer support. This self help guide comes from a series that you can access and print from Moodjuice. Other titles available include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Panic
- Sleep Problems
- Bereavement
- Anger Problems
- Social Anxiety
- Phobias
- Traumatic Stress
- Obsessions and Compulsions
- Chronic Pain

## **Some Useful Organisations**

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The following organisations or services may be able to offer support, information and advice.

### **Samaritans**

Samaritans provides confidential emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. You don't have to be suicidal to call us. We are here for you if you're worried about something, feel upset or confused, or you just want to talk to someone.

*Phone:*               **08457 90 90 90**

*Website:*           <http://www.samaritans.org>

### **Compassionate Friends**

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is an organisation of bereaved parents and their families offering understanding, support and encouragement to others after the death of a child or children

*Phone:*               **0845 123 2304**

*Website:*           <http://www.tcf.org.uk/>

### **Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society**

A Help Line which can offer support to those who have been affected by a still birth or the death of a baby in the first few weeks of life.

*Phone:*               **020 7436 5881**

*Website:*           <http://www.uk-sands.org/>

### **Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland**

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland is a national organisation which offers a free confidential bereavement counselling service to people of all ages.

*Phone:*               **0845 600 2227**

*Website:*           <http://www.crusescotland.org.uk>

### **Breathing Space**

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phone line you can call when you're feeling down. You might be worried about something - money, work, relationships, exams - or maybe you're just feeling fed up and can't put your finger on why.

*Phone:*               **0800 83 85 87**

*Website:*           <http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk>

### **Living Life to the Full**

Living Life to the Full is an online life skills course made up of several different modules designed to help develop key skills and tackle some of the problems we all face from time to time.

*Website:*           <http://www.lltff.com/>

**Winston's Wish**

Help for grieving children and their families Winstons Wish helps bereaved children and young people rebuild their lives after a family death. We offer practical support and guidance to families, professionals and anyone concerned about a grieving child.

*Phone:* **0845 2030 405**

*Website:* <http://www.winstonswish.org.uk>

**Child Bereavement Charity**

Grief in its many forms is one of the most painful experiences that anyone can suffer. Every year thousands of families experience the grief of losing a baby, child, mother, father, brother or sister. We believe families deserve the best emotional care in such a crisis

*Phone:* **0845 357 1000**

*Website:* <http://www.childbereavement.org.uk>

## **Further Reading**

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The following books may be able to offer support, information and advice.

### **Helping Children Cope with Grief: Facing a Death in the Family**

Nothing can take away the pain and loss for a child who has lost someone close to them, but there is a great deal that a caring adult can do to avoid the long-term distress which can be caused by hidden fears and anxieties. This book also deals with the problems special to terminal illness or sudden death, and the misunderstandings that can arise from a well-meant remark.

*Author:* Rosemary Wells

*Published:* 1988

### **Living with Loss: A Guide for the Recently Widowed**

Drawing on personal experience and on interviews with other bereaved people, the author has created a survival handbook for the widowed. It shows how, over time, the healing process can be assisted, and how you can get the most from friends, organisations and resources to make life enjoyable again.

*Author:* Liz McNeill Taylor

*Published:* 2009