

The Impact of Bereavement on A Family

A death within the family impacts on the family as a whole, as well as on each member of the family individually. It is almost impossible to know how we will react, even if the death was anticipated, and everyone's responses and reactions will be as variable as their individual personalities.

Whilst we may expect everyone to feel sadness about a death, this is just one of a range of feelings that may be experienced. The ways in which people grieve will differ, and this can be a source of anxiety or conflict. It is important to recognise these differences and allow people to grieve in their own way.

Particularly challenging for all concerned can be sudden and unexpected deaths, deaths for which there seems to be no reason, the death of a young child perhaps, or a suicide.

Regardless of the cause of death, initial feelings are likely to be those of shock and disbelief or a sense of feeling numb. Inevitably, in the days and weeks following, the number of practical tasks that need to be carried out can give a sense of purpose and control. It is often observed at funerals that the people most close to the person who has died conduct themselves with dignity and are considered to have been very brave.

Following the funeral, there can be an expectation that a family will quickly start to pick up the threads of day-to-day life. For children this can be helpful but for adults it may seem a daunting prospect; most often, this is when their grieving has only just begun.

The months that follow may be filled with unfamiliar feelings of considerable intensity; rage, misery, worry, anxiety or a continuing sense of feeling numb. At times it may feel that things are improving, only for feelings of loss to intensify again. Over time, the balance of these feelings will alter, and the difficult times will lessen. The feelings will become less intense, and the patches of respite and relief will grow.

Death is a natural part of life. Somehow in society this fact tends to be forgotten, and instead we may hope and pretend that it won't happen to our family. When it does it is important to remember that, whilst we will never forget the person who has died, we will in time be able to find a way to live with what has happened and enjoy positive experiences again.