

Dealing with Bereavement and Grief

Bereavement & Grieving

Grieving is the way a person responds to loss. It is highly personal experience and unfortunately, pain is part of the process. It can involve a wide range of emotions and can apply to a number of differing situations. In the context of operations, the losses of buddies can be sudden and violent. In cases where you lose a friend or loved one reactions can include: shock, despair, injustice anger, guilt & numbness. These feelings are common and as long as they do not continue for a long period of time, they should not be a cause for concern.

For many people, particularly younger people, encountering death may be a new & bewildering experience. They may be a number of questions relating to bereavement that concern you

- **How Long Does Grief Last?** – Although the experience of operational losses never completely fades, generally, given time (usually a few weeks) you will come to terms with the loss. You will find your mood lifts and your concentration levels improve. There are some specific reasons which can extend the grieving process. These can include anger issues, relationship problems and additional losses or casualties.
- **Will The Grieving Be Worst At Particular Times?** – Yes, as time passes and we come to terms with our losses, there will be events that will have the potential to trigger pangs of emotional pain. These could be the anniversary of the loss, reliving the circumstances of the death when giving evidence at the Coroners Inquest, Remembrance Day or meeting family members of the Deceased.
- **What Is Causing My Coping Difficulties** – There are many myths relating to bereavement. Listed below are a number of common misconceptions:
 1. Grieving means I'm weak
 2. If I let myself feel anything about the loss, I'll lose it completely and won't be able to function.
 3. If I feel happiness, I will feel that I am disrespecting my loved one or close friend.
 4. If I move on with my life, I will be deserting the deceased.

The important factor to remember here is that these thoughts are myths NOT TRUTHS

- **What Can I Do To Myself Help?** – Some symptoms can get worse before they get better. Don't block your emotions, your feelings must be worked through. Get talking, the longer you wait, the more difficult it becomes. There are other coping measures that you can employ:
 1. Recognise that each person grieves differently and there is not set time to 'recover'.
 2. Journal your thoughts and feelings about the loss
 3. Try and find the good in a bad situation e.g. you may have a much clearer perception on what is a priority in your life – hope, strength, goals, growth and not taking loved ones for granted.
 4. Try to hold positive benign thoughts about the loss, like "My buddy is in a safe place now" or "We did the best we could in a difficult situation".
 5. Try not to change the past, instead focus on making the most of the present and the future.

- When Should I Seek Help? – Never be afraid to talk to someone, whom you trust and feel comfortable with, about unresolved bereavement issues. There are no rigid rules about when to seek help, we all move down this particular road at differing speeds. You may wish to seek professional help if the following are present:
 1. If 3 to 6 months have elapsed & you still have strong feelings about the death
 2. Your reactions to the loss seem out of control
 3. Your current mood is effecting your ability to enjoy life with your colleagues family and friends.
- How Can I help Others? – There may well be occasions when you have to engage with the bereaved family, parents, partner or spouse. These occasions could be the actual funeral of the deceased, a subsequent memorial service or a later social occasion.
- These encounters can be a challenging experiences and may be occasions when you feel ill-equipped to deal with the person appropriately. This is a perfectly understandable response and one that most people have to face. However, by being yourself, choosing your words carefully and putting the bereaved person at ease, you will be best placed to help them.
- When assisting the bereaved do not be afraid to talk about the deceased. In many cases the bereaved person needs the acknowledgement that the deceased actually existed. By actively discussing the lost person, talking about there habits, foibles and strengths you are validating that process. Don't be afraid to ask questions about the deceased, it shows that you have a genuine interest in the deceased person.
- Be aware that on occasions a bereaved person can become angry, sometimes, it may be directed at you. In these (thankfully rare) instances, don't take it personally, don't argue, be patient and holder your temper. If you in turn become angry you may put the wrong meaning on your words!
- There other area's that you may wish to consider when dealing with the bereaved person or family:
 - > Remember that everyone is different and we all react in differing ways
 - > Don't tell them "You know how they feel".
 - > Don't attempt to 'cheer them up'
 - > Do touch them if you feel comfortable and if it feels appropriate.
 - > Don't tell them "at least you've got" (this usually a reference to other children)

Remember, some feelings connected to bereavement will never go away completely. It is the tapestry of events (both positive & negative) that we will never completely forget. However, whilst we will never forget them, given time, we will come to terms with them

What matters most is that we do not allow the issues to effect our normal functioning, our hopes for the future and our zest for life. We owe to the deceased to do this.