



Bereavement support

**Information from the palliative care
team and psychological therapy team
(POST) at Dimbleby Cancer Care**

This leaflet is about some of the emotions you may feel when someone close to you has died. It explains how the palliative care team and psychological therapies team (POST) at Dimbleby Cancer Care at Guy's and St Thomas' may be able to help you. It also has details of other organisations that offer support.

After someone close to you has died you may feel a range of different emotions. People react in many different ways: there is no set pattern to grief. It can be very painful. How long it lasts also varies, but for some people it can take a long time. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Although your feelings are personal to you, they may be shared by others in similar circumstances.

Emotions you may feel

Numbness/disbelief

At first, you may:

- be in a state of shock
- find it difficult to believe that it has really happened
- think you see the person
- carry on as though the person is still here.

Anger

At different times your anger may be directed towards others, or even yourself. Questions may arise:

- 'Why me?'
- 'Why them?'
- 'How could they leave me alone?'
- 'What have I done to deserve this?'

Guilt

You may feel guilty when you laugh, or for being so miserable. You may feel you are to blame in some way.

After a death it is common to feel regrets, such as:

- 'if only I had said this ... '
- 'if only I hadn't done that ... '

Loneliness/isolation

Nobody can know exactly how you feel. Your relationship was unique and nothing can replace your loss. At times you may think you will go on feeling like this forever.

Panic/fear

At times you may question your ability to cope. It is not unusual to feel anxious. During your grief you will need to re-adjust to living without the person who has died. You may need to take on some roles you've never had to before.

Feeling unwell

Not sleeping, your appetite being affected, feeling faint, dizzy or disoriented are all normal reactions to bereavement. It is not surprising if you feel like this. Your body has had to deal with a shock that affects you physically as well as emotionally. If it persists or gets worse, go to see your GP, who is there to help.

Wanting to make big changes

Some people may want to change the situation by making rapid decisions such as moving house or getting rid of possessions. It can be tempting to think that this will make things better but it is generally worth taking time with these decisions.

Grieving is not a straightforward process and it usually takes time to re-adjust to life after a bereavement. It may help to talk to others about the way you are feeling. Sometimes people feel they don't want to 'burden' family or friends. If this is the case, we are here and available to support and help you.

What support is available?

We understand people may need support at different times and in different ways.

You may feel more comfortable talking to someone on a **one-to-one** basis or with other family members, or you may prefer a **group setting**, where you can hear how others are dealing with loss. The psychological therapies team (POST) offers this support.

The team comprises psychology, counselling and psychotherapy and has access to psychiatry. It deals with a range of problems relating to bereavement, including:

- adjustment issues
- relationship issues
- specific problems such as panic attacks and low mood
- long-term psychological problems.

Our service extends to carers, family and friends as well as children. We can meet with you individually, as a couple, or as a family, depending on your preference.

What happens when you contact our service?

Someone from our team will talk with you about your current needs and will book an appointment with one of our therapists should you decide this is what you want.

We arrange a convenient appointment time for you and can meet you at Guy's or St Thomas'. Meetings with the therapists are free and usually last up to 50 minutes. A number of sessions will be agreed with you according to your need.

The bereavement group, usually comprising six to eight people, runs regularly each fortnight, over six months.

If you decide that formal counselling sessions are not for you but you do want to talk to someone, the palliative care **social workers** may be able to provide this support.

Memorial services

There is a memorial service every autumn for the relatives, friends and carers of patients who have died under the care of the Guy's and St Thomas' palliative care team. You should receive an invitation by early October. If you do not, or your address has changed, please leave a message for our palliative care social workers on 020 7188 4754 and they will get back to you.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the palliative care social workers **Alan Hayder** or **Nicky Tredinnick** on 020 7188 4754.

Or ask your general practitioner (GP), the hospital ward or specialist nurse to contact us on your behalf. We can arrange an interpreter if you need one.

Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals offer a range of cancer-related information leaflets for patients and carers, available at www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/cancer-leaflets. For information leaflets on other conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Other sources of support

Cruse Bereavement Care

t: 0844 4779400 (daytime helpline)

w: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

e: helpline@cruse.org.uk

Cruse - Hope Again (website which aims to support young people after the death of someone close).

t: 0808 808 1677 **e:** hopeagain@cruse.org.uk

w: www.hopeagain.org.uk

Lewisham Bereavement Counselling (for people living in Lewisham)

t: 020 8692 6252 **w:** www.lewishambc.org

e: lewishambereavement@btinternet.com

Waterloo Community Counselling Service (for people living in Lambeth)

t: 020 7928 3462 **w:** www.waterloocc.co.uk

e: info@waterloocc.co.uk

Southwark Carers Counselling Service (for people living in Southwark)

t: 020 7708 4497

w: www.southwarkcarerscounselling.org.uk

Samaritans (24-hour helpline)

t: 08457 909090 **w:** www.samaritans.org

e: jo@samaritans.org

Candle Project at St Christopher's Hospice

For children and young people up to age 18 in south-east London.

t: 020 8768 4500 (ask for the Candle Project)

Dimbleby Cancer Care provides cancer support services for Guy's and St Thomas'. We have a drop-in information area staffed by specialist nurses and offer complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice for patients and carers.

Dimbleby Cancer Care is located in the Welcome Village of the Cancer Centre at Guy's. **t:** 020 7188 5918
e: DimblebyCancerCare@gstt.nhs.uk

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

Leaflet number: 2078/VER4

Date published: September 2016

Review date: March 2018

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