Introduction

Many personal decisions are made and problems solved through discussions with friends or family, a College Tutor or Director of Studies, a Nurse, Chaplain, colleague, line manager or a GP. However, at times it is right to seek help away from one’s familiar daily environment. The University Counselling Service exists to meet such a need. Seeking counselling is about making a positive choice to get help by talking confidentially with a professionally trained listener who has no other role in your life.

Who are the Counsellors?

The Service is staffed by a team of trained and accredited counsellors and therapists. The counsellors are all experienced in helping people from many different backgrounds and cultures, and with a wide range of personal and work issues.

Some of the counsellors who work in the Service are Associates, in the late stages of their counselling training. Their work is carefully supervised within the Service. Please let us know if you would prefer not to be seen by an Associate.

Contact us

University Counselling Service
3rd Floor, Student Services Centre
Bene’t Street
Cambridge
CB2 3PT

Email: reception@studentsupport.cam.ac.uk
Web: www.counselling.cam.ac.uk
Tel: 01223 332865
Grief & Bereavement

The loss of someone close can be devastating. We all grieve differently and the way you grieve will be unique to you. How you grieve will depend on many factors including the relationship you had with the person who has died, your cultural and religious beliefs and your support networks such as family and friends.

It is important to remember that grief is a normal response to loss and that you may well find yourself grieving differently to other family members. Our response to loss can change from hour to hour, day to day. Some days will be better than others and it is important to take things one step at a time. Our response to loss may contain a range of emotions, such as sadness, anger, guilt, frustration, emptiness and anxiety. Everyone experiences grief differently and there is no ‘normal’ or ‘right’ way to grieve. Our response to loss can change from hour to hour, day to day. Some days will be better than others and it is important to take things one step at a time.

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Understanding your emotions

Shock and disbelief
Initially you may feel shock or numbness and confusion. Sometimes you may find yourself carrying on with your life as if nothing has happened. These are all normal reactions and will lessen over time.

Loss
friendship, companionship or intimacy can bring profound sadness. At other times, people feel sad for the loss of a relationship that they were never able to have with the deceased. Allow yourself other comforts that are helpful for you - huddling under a warm duvet, cuddling a pet, having a warm bath, or sitting in some sunshine for a while.

Fatigue, loss of appetite and sleep disturbance
Listen to how your body is feeling. Grieving is exhausting and you may well feel more tired than usual, but also have difficulty sleeping and poor appetite. Sleep when you can, even if only for a few hours at a time. Try to eat a little and often to preserve energy. Remember to stay hydrated, drink plenty of water. Avoid too much caffeine and other stimulants such as excessive alcohol or illegal drugs.
Restlessness, heightened anxiety and tearfulness.
You may long for relief from emotional pain and fear losing others that you care about. If you are experiencing heightened symptoms of anxiety you could try some gentle breathing exercises and yoga while listening to some calming music, even for just a few moments a day. Crying can bring relief as it is an outlet for the emotions, tension and strain that have built up.

If you have physical symptoms at this time be aware that some of these may be due to your bereavement. However, if you are concerned that you may be poorly for another reason, contact a medical practitioner. College nurses are contactable (check your college website for the latest information). If your academic work is affected, speak with your tutor or Director of Studies.

Get some exercise
This might be the last thing you feel like doing, but it can help. Exercise uses up excess energy and is a way of releasing some of the frustration you might be feeling. Exercise also releases endorphins, which can help you to feel better and lift your mood.

Take things slowly
Take things slowly if you are able to and do things carefully to stay safe, as you may feel preoccupied and have less concentration. Do one thing at a time.

Delay doing any difficult or dangerous tasks that require full concentration, it is easy to make mistakes and injure yourself at a time of high stress.

Let out your feelings
Try not to bottle up or push away your painful feelings, allow some quiet/reflective time each day for them to surface. Listening to favourite music can help, as can simple stretching and breathing exercises.

Express yourself in some other way
Many people find writing or drawing their feelings really helps clarify the overwhelming mix of emotions. Choose a form you feel comfortable with - a diary, letter, prose, poetry, song. If you can’t find the words to describe what you’re feeling try ‘speaking’ about your experience through dance, song, painting or with textiles. Let shape, form, texture, colour, rhythm be your words.

Over time the emotional swings associated with loss of a significant person lessen in intensity as you learn to adapt to your changed circumstances, but to begin with it can feel overwhelming. These are all normal reactions to loss and a natural part of the grieving process. Given time, support and understanding they will lessen and you will gradually begin to feel better able to cope.
Ask for help
It is not always easy to ask for help and it takes courage. Start by accepting that you need help. Ask someone you feel you can trust - a friend, a tutor, a college nurse or chaplain, a parent. A phone conversation, audio or video call with someone you trust can help a lot.

Support from the University Counselling Service
You may want to contact the University Counselling Service. Talking to a counsellor can help you find your way through the painful and otherwise lonely process of grieving and help you to make sense of your feelings.

Please see our website for our opening hours, counselling and online self-help provision, and to make an appointment.

Further resources
‘Sudden’ offers helpful information and advice to people who have been bereaved by a sudden death:
www.suddendeath.org

Cruse Bereavement Care have helpful information on their website and a helpline number and email:
www.cruse.org.uk
0808 808 1677
helpline@cruse.org.uk

The Samaritans offer a free 24/7 helpline and email support:
www.samaritans.org
116 123
jo@samaritans.org

Help2makesense offers guidance and support to young people and children who have been bereaved:
www.help2makesense.org

Other External Online Support Groups
The Mix offer free information and support to people under 25 years based in the UK and have an online chat forum for young people:
www.themix.org.uk
info@themix.org.uk

WAY (Widowed and Young) is a national charity in the UK for people aged 50 or under when their partner has died. It is a peer-to-peer support group and costs £25 to join:
www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

Other Online Resources
NHS Choices ‘Grief after bereavement or loss’ has information about how to cope and mental health and wellbeing.
www.nhs.uk

What’s Your Grief offers an online supportive community, resources and discussion about grief:
https://whatsyourgrief.com
The Good Grief Trust offers support and resources by others who have been bereaved: www.thegoodgrieftrust.org

The LOSS Foundation offers online support group for anyone who has lost a loved one to coronavirus (and a separate online group for anyone who has lost a loved one to cancer) and has a short video describing the stages of grief - Phases of Grief https://thelossfoundation.org

Apps
Child Bereavement UK offer an app for 11-25-year-olds who have been bereaved of someone important to them. It can also be used by friends, teachers, parents, and professionals who would like to know how to support bereaved young people.

Calm offer an app to help you manage your mood in the grief process with meditation.

Book references:
On Grief and Grieving - Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss

Meaning Reconstruction and the experience of loss

Continuing Bonds, New Understandings of Grief

The Compassionate Friends have also compiled a suggested reading list with books categorised for ease of reference.

‘Grief never ends,
But it changes
It’s a passage, not a place to stay.
Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of
Faith, it is the price of Love’

(unknown)
Available Self Help Leaflets 2022-23

Anger Management
Anxiety and Panic
Asserting Yourself
Concentration - a CBT guide
Coping with Exams
Depression
Eating Disorders
Effective Communication and Managing Conflict
Grief and Bereavement
Homesickness
How to be Mindful
Insomnia
Intermitting
Loneliness
Managing Alcohol Consumption
Parental Separation and Divorce
Perfectionism - a CBT approach
Phobias - a CBT approach
Post-Traumatic Stress
Procrastination
Self-Esteem
Self-Harm
Simple Relaxation
Transition to University
What Is Mindfulness
Worry - a CBT Approach