

# Living loss after

A grief guide for  
young people

**SeeSaw**  
Grief Support

For children and young  
people in Oxfordshire

# thanks

**A huge thank you to all the young people using the SeeSaw service who were prepared to share their experiences and advice in this booklet.**

**They were instrumental in helping us set the tone and content and helped us stay focused on the practical tips included.**

**They would like you to know you're not alone, and – with the right support and time – it is possible to 'grow around your grief' and go on to live a happy and fulfilling life after someone has died.**

“ My close family and SeeSaw really helped me when my dad died. ”

“ My SeeSaw sessions gave me a safe space to talk about difficult things. ”

“ SeeSaw didn't brush things under the carpet and gave me really useful advice. My worker asked helpful questions and didn't dismiss my worries and feelings. ”

“ My close family were alongside me throughout and I was surprised how much support I received from them. SeeSaw helped us all understand we were coping differently and how to support each other. ”

“ Talking to SeeSaw is like a big hug but with words! ”

“ I am slowly starting to have more good moments than bad. ”

“ I use the breathing advice daily! ”

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# How do I use this booklet?

**Most importantly:  
you don't have to read  
this booklet in one go!**

**Keep it to hand in  
your room, or on your  
phone/computer, and  
find the sections that  
feel most relevant to  
you, dipping in where  
– and when – it feels  
most appropriate.**

There is no 'right way' to grieve or to feel. We are all individuals, so it is helpful to remember not to compare yourself to others too much, as we will all feel and behave differently. This depends on lots of things: our family dynamics; relationships with others; personality; previous experiences; and the nature of the loss we are facing.

In the booklet you will find information and advice from experts that other young people we have worked with tell us helped them after someone died. We hope this helps you recognise and manage the range of challenges and emotions this can present.

You may read or hear some unfamiliar language following a death. We have put any terms that might be unfamiliar in italics and the surrounding paragraphs should explain clearly what they mean.

Lots of young people find that with the help of family and friends they can find ways to cope with their grief, and they don't need to talk to anyone else. But if at any point you feel it would help to talk to one of our Children and Families Bereavement Practitioners, you can ask a parent or carer to refer you. Older young people can refer themselves by emailing [info@seesaw.org.uk](mailto:info@seesaw.org.uk) or using our online referral form.

## Things to look out for



These boxes share key thoughts to consider for that section.

### **PRACTICAL TIP**

Practical tips will have this stamp with them, so you can spot them at a glance.

“ Teenagers who have used our service kindly shared their own experiences and advice for young people who have been bereaved. Their words appear in boxes like this. ”

# Section 1

## Understanding grief

“Grief feels like loads of emotions at once and you can't always control when or how you respond to these feelings. It's hard. 14-year-old”

### What is grief?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, grief is: “A feeling of great sadness, especially when someone dies.”

Grief is most often associated with sadness – in reality, it's probably easier to say that grief is a bundle of different emotions you might experience when someone dies, which can include other powerful feelings as well as sadness. It's also important to remember that grief can be experienced after all kinds of different losses – such as moving home or the end of a relationship – while *bereavement* specifically deals with feelings of loss associated with the death of someone important to us.

Key thoughts

People can also experience powerful grief and bereavement emotions after the loss of a much-loved pet – and animals can mourn their companions and owners too. These can feel just as deep and powerful as the feelings we experience after a person dies, but ultimately there are fewer long-term and practical life changes associated with the death of an animal than that of a person, which can mean there are fewer other ‘secondary losses’ (such as moving home or school) to deal with.

### What does grief feel like?

Grief can include a lot of other emotions in addition to sadness. After someone important to you dies (or if you know they are dying) you might experience some, all, or none of the feelings and sensations below. That's because grief is unique to you, your life, and the relationship you had with that person. The important thing to remember is that there is **no right or wrong way to feel** after someone dies.

Key thoughts

You won't necessarily feel grief as a constant state; for most people these feelings can fizz up in bursts, like a shaken can of drink.

“None of it feels real: I feel like I've switched dimensions – it's like I am constantly shifting between different realities, and I am hit by my grief over and over again. 16-year-old”



## How long will it last?

In the same way that your feelings are unique to you, so is the timescale of your grief. Lots of people say that grief never goes away, but that it looks and feels different as time goes on. Have a look at the 'Understanding grief – what the experts say' section on page 11 for more information on how grief can change over time.



It's very normal to feel fine for a while and then suddenly feel a surge of emotions that seem to come out of nowhere and catch you off guard. This is called a 'grief burst' and can be triggered by memories, music, smells, special foods and so on, as well as the more predictable 'big days' such as anniversaries, Christmas and birthdays.

Although you may always feel grief in some way, in our experience, young people tell us that they do feel better as time goes on.

## Am I normal?

As well as a rollercoaster of emotions, you might find certain things harder than you did before. Here are some of the things young people tell us they have struggled with:

- problems getting to sleep/staying asleep
- struggling to concentrate or focus
- finding it difficult to remember things
- not feeling hungry
- getting angry very quickly
- getting upset very quickly
- worrying about things
- finding it difficult leaving the people you love
- worrying about bad things happening to people you care about
- tummy upsets and/or headaches

It is common to find any of these things difficult after someone you love dies. They might happen straight away, months later, or not at all. If you feel you are struggling to manage, it is important to ask for help. Think about emotions as waves on a shore: they wash over us and then they leave. This process repeats throughout our life and with all different emotions – both comfortable and uncomfortable ones.



Often these things will get better with time, but if challenging emotions or physical symptoms persist it's always best to talk to your family doctor about how you're feeling to rule out any problems not associated with grief. Thoughts of harming yourself are less common and not always grief-related; it's always best to speak to an adult you trust and ask for help if you have thoughts like this.

### PRACTICAL TIP

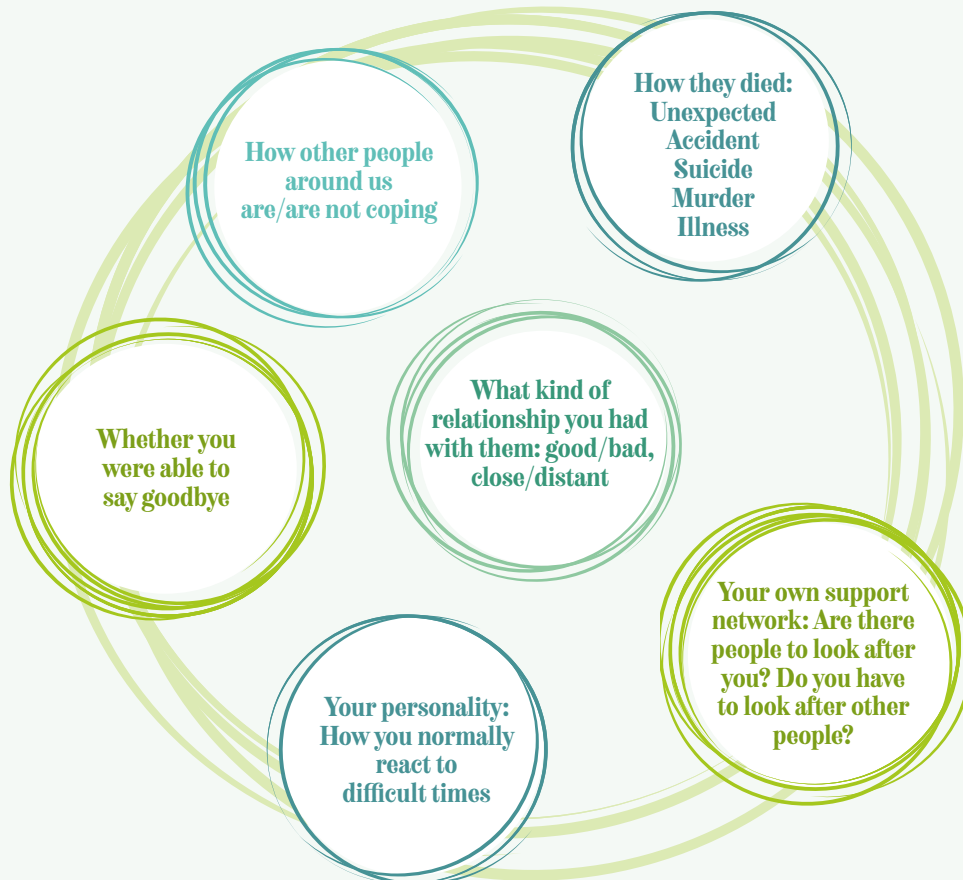
The good news is that there are many things you can do that might help: look at the 'Managing emotions – what we know can help' section on page 15 for more ideas.

## What can influence our grief reactions?

When someone dies, how we feel and react will be influenced by different things. It's important to remember people often have different reactions.

### How someone died

The way in which someone died can affect your reaction. It can be easy to think that dying one way is worse than another, but each situation is different. Because of all the elements involved (shown below), we can never really know how someone else's experience compares to our own. We support young people who have been bereaved in many ways; what we've learned from them is that certain types of death might have a particular impact.



## Sudden or unexpected death

(accidents/sudden illness/  
suicide/murder/in service:  
e.g. army, police etc)

When someone dies unexpectedly it can be common for people to experience some of the feelings below:

- **shock** – not believing it is real/unable to process
- **guilt** – feeling it might have happened because of something you did
- **regret** – feeling you wish you had said or done something differently before they died
- **hurt** – the pain of not being able to say goodbye; feeling there were things you wish you could have told them
- **blame** – feeling that their death was the fault of a particular person
- **anger** – at the person for leaving you, and/or at those involved in their death
- **fear** – being concerned the same thing might happen to you or someone else you care about

### PRACTICAL TIP

Look at Section 3: 'Managing emotions – what we know can help' for ideas to help you cope with challenging emotions.

With certain types of sudden death, it is common for people to experience some additional feelings to those on the previous page.

### Suicide:

- **Confusion** – Often relatives and friends will never fully understand why someone chose to end their own life, and this can be hard to accept. You may find yourself asking lots of questions to try to make sense of it.
- **Self-blame** – When you don't understand why someone chose to take their life, it can be easy to blame yourself and think things like “If only I had spoken to them more or told them I loved them more often...” or “Maybe it was because of something I did that upset them...”
- **Questioning your relationship** – When someone dies by suicide sometimes people worry it means the person didn't love them: “If they loved me, they wouldn't have chosen to take their life.”

#### PRACTICAL TIP

The best way to deal with these feelings is to express them. You might not feel you can do this with friends and family, especially if you are worried they won't understand. You can ask for support from SeeSaw, or if you don't feel ready for that, you might find some of the resources at the end of the booklet helpful.

All these feelings are natural reactions, but what is really important to know is that even if you don't have answers, it does not mean their death was your fault, or that they didn't love you. When someone decides to end their life, they often believe things that are not true, like thinking the people they love would be better off without them. Sometimes people can't see a way out of what they're experiencing (such as mental illness, or difficult life circumstances) and believe ending their life is the only way to be free from the pain they're in. Those who have survived suicide have shared they genuinely believed, in that moment, that ending their life was the only option: their life was going to cause more pain to their loved ones than their death – a very difficult concept to understand if your mind is well.



## Murder:

- **Injustice** – This may feel particularly strong if the suspect is never found/while the investigation is being carried out (which can take a long time and can feel as if nothing is happening), or if the person responsible does not get the conviction you feel they deserve.
- **Revenge** – Often those who have been bereaved by murder feel like all their emotions fuel a desire for revenge: it can feel like revenge is the only way the person responsible will face the consequences of their actions and you will feel at peace again.
- **Fear** – It is common for people to feel afraid the same thing might happen to them, especially if the murder was at random. You might feel scared to go out and do normal things.



These feelings are natural but can be intense and overwhelming. If you identify with the feeling of 'revenge' it's important to know that people who hold on to this feeling often say it never makes them feel any better, it just makes difficult feelings last longer.

### PRACTICAL TIP

The best way to deal with these feelings is to express them. You might not feel you can do this with friends and family, especially if you are worried that they won't understand. You can ask for support from SeeSaw, or if you don't feel ready to do that, you might find some of the resources at the end of the booklet helpful.

## In service: (army/police/fire/emergency services etc)

- **Anger** – You may feel angry if your special person died while helping others. It might feel as if they chose helping strangers above staying with you. You might also feel angry with the people they were trying to help for being the reason your person risked their life.



## Long-term illness

When someone's death was expected due to a long-term illness it can be common for people to experience some of the feelings below:

- **Shock** – Even if the death is expected, when your special person dies it can still come as a shock, particularly if you have been used to them living with illness for a long time.
- **Relief** – People often feel guilty for feeling this way, but it's very common for people to feel relieved after the death of someone who has been ill. It can be emotionally and physically tiring for everyone in the family when someone is terminally ill; it's understandable to feel relieved that their pain is over – and your anxious waiting too.



You might recognise having experienced the feelings associated with grief before someone who is terminally ill has died: this is called 'anticipatory grief'.

### PRACTICAL TIP

The best way to deal with feelings is to express them and share them with someone you trust. You might not feel you can do this with friends and family, especially if you're worried they won't understand. You can ask for support from SeeSaw; if you don't feel ready for that, you might find some of the resources at the end of the booklet helpful.

## Complicated relationships

Although every relationship has ups and downs, some relationships are more complicated than others. When you have a complicated relationship with someone, how you feel about their death can be confusing.

If you have had a negative relationship with someone, you may find you still feel upset they have died; this might feel surprising. For some people, it's the fact that the chance of repairing the relationship has now gone for good, or that the person may have died without ever acknowledging or taking responsibility for hurtful words or actions.



You can still feel a sense of loss for a relationship you never got to have with your person when they were alive – for example, an absent parent or a sibling or parent who died when you were too young to remember them.

# Section 2

## Understanding grief – what the experts say

**Grief is often confusing: it can be difficult to understand what is going on in your own mind and body day to day.**

But grief is something everyone will experience at some point in their life and is a very normal human reaction, not a mental health problem. Although grief is painful and uncomfortable, it is an understandable reaction to loss, so we talk about 'healthy grief' (although it can feel far from 'healthy' when you're experiencing it). By contrast, unhealthy grief happens when someone gets 'stuck' in an emotional state and can't experience a range of feelings over time, and they might need some extra support to help them move forward.

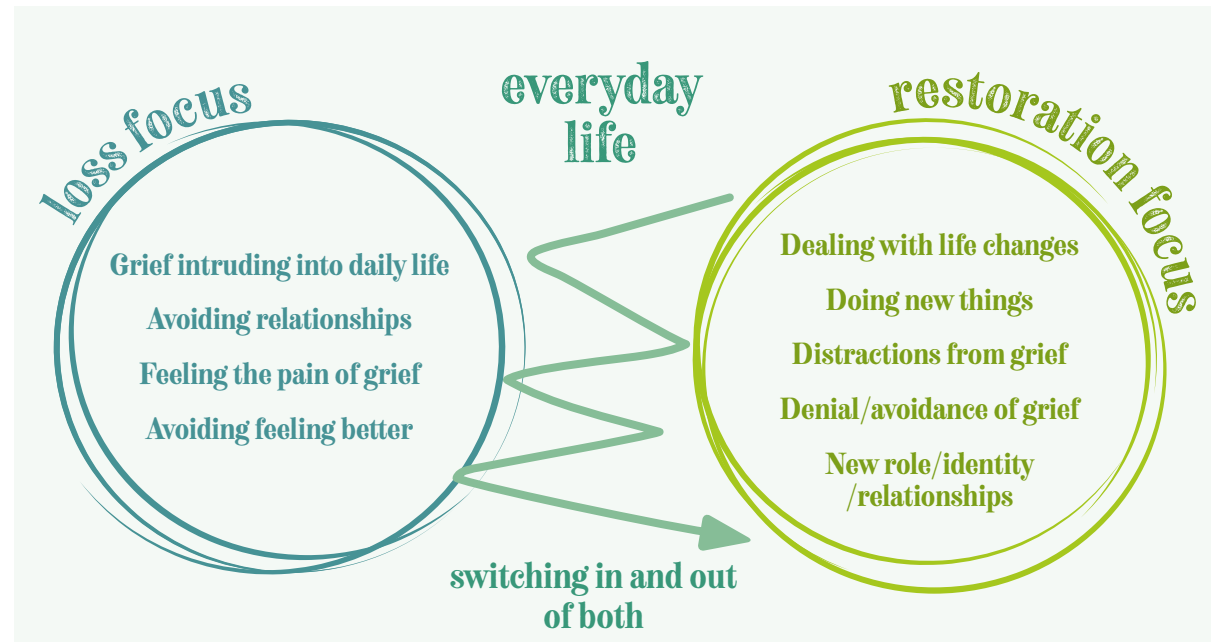
Understanding grief better is something that experts have spent a lot of time researching. Over the page are two theories that try to help explain how healthy grief works.

## How can the 'Dual process model'<sup>†</sup> help me understand what healthy grief looks like?

People often worry that they're not feeling the 'right' thing after someone they love dies. Maybe they just watched a show on Netflix and felt guilty because for a few moments they weren't thinking about their loss. Or perhaps they feel bad because they keep themselves distracted so they don't think about their uncomfortable emotions.

The truth is neither of these are wrong: it's ok not to feel sad 24/7 and it's ok to want to distract yourself. Put simply, the 'Dual process model' says that healthy grief is about trying to have a balance of experiencing your grief emotions and also getting on with your life.

Families can experience conflict or misunderstandings when people are spending time in opposite sides of the model and can't understand why others are behaving differently. Understanding how healthy grief works can help families treat each other with more patience when they are using different coping strategies to process their grief.



<sup>†</sup> Dual Process Model: Stroebe & Schut, 1999

### PRACTICAL TIP

If your family all seem to be coping in different ways, try the following:

- Share the 'Dual process model' and 'Growing around grief' diagrams with your family and carers so you can better understand what each other might be experiencing.
- Agree to be kind and patient with one another when you are on different sides of the 'Dual process' diagram.
- Agree together how you each might share/signal what you need in that moment: how will others know what you need? How will you know what they need?

Healthy grief switches back and forth between both sides of the diagram. It's ok to let yourself feel the pain of grief, but it isn't helpful for you to feel it all the time. Likewise, it's ok to distract yourself from your grief, but it doesn't help if you never let yourself feel or express it: letting out a little at a time is helpful to stop big feelings building up. If you find yourself feeling 'stuck' on either side of the model, talk to an adult you trust or to SeeSaw.

You can use the Dual Process activity sheet on page 43 in the resources section to help you explore how this fits with your own experience.



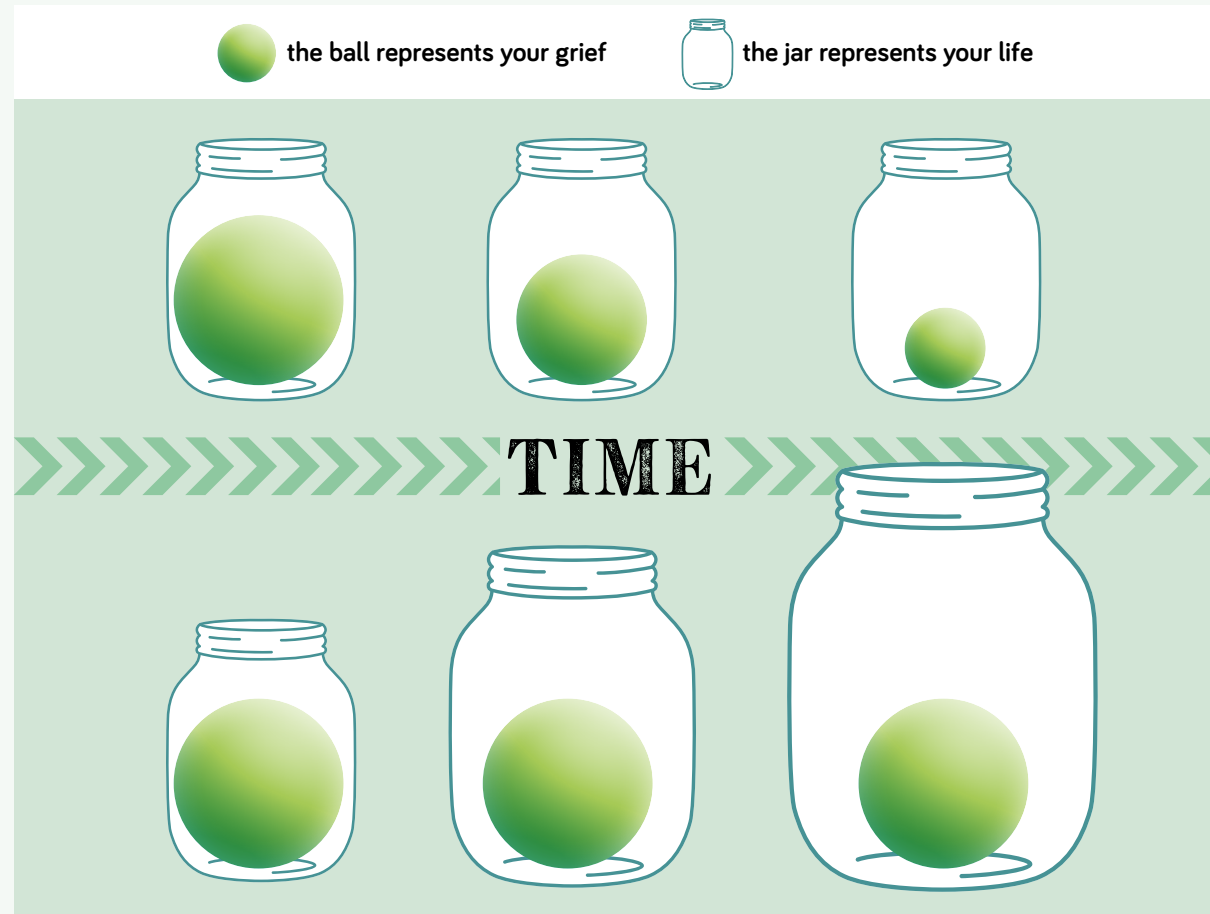
“The ‘Growing around grief’ theory made me not worry that I was just going to ‘get over it’, or that that’s what people expected me to do. That grief being the same size doesn’t mean that it hurts as much. That feeling is not going to go, but you are going to grow around it. 14-year-old”

## What does ‘Growing around grief’\* mean?

Imagine your life is a jar. Now imagine your grief is a ball. When someone dies it can feel like the ball of grief has been squeezed into the jar and takes up all the room. You might feel like your grief has taken over your entire life and is overwhelming everything.

Look at the diagram here. Some people think that over time, grief gets smaller and smaller (like the ball in the top row) and feels less painful and overwhelming. For others, this idea feels uncomfortable: they might worry that if their grief is getting smaller, it means that they care less about their special person over time, or that one day their grief will disappear as if they have forgotten their person and what they meant to them.

The second row looks at grief differently: the jar is still your life – and the ball is still your grief – but instead of your grief getting smaller, it is your life that grows bigger. As you live, it expands with new experiences and relationships. The grief never changes – it will always be there – but as your life grows it will feel less overwhelming and easier to manage.



\* *Growing Around Grief*: Lois Tonkin, 1996



# Section 3

## Managing emotions – what we know can help

### Why are some emotions more uncomfortable to experience than others?

There are no 'bad' emotions: all emotions tell us something about where we are and what we might need, and some feel nicer than others. Our uncomfortable emotions, or emotional pain, give us signs we need to actively care for ourselves: just as a pain in our leg means we might need to rest, emotional pain also can show we need some care.

When we feel anxious, afraid, or overwhelmed, our brains and our bodies act in a way that protects us

from 'threat', just as they do when there's a physical threat that we need strength or speed to escape. Usually, when a physical danger has disappeared, our brain will notice this, and we start to feel calmer. But when we're living with an emotional issue that lasts a while, we adapt to this and continue to feel 'under threat'. Living on 'high alert' is stressful and, over time, can make us feel emotionally drained and often physically unwell.

### Is it all in my head?

In a word, no! Stress may start in the brain, but there are real physical reactions to stress hormones that can affect us too.

## What's going on under the surface?

When your brain is stimulated by a perceived 'threat' (physical or emotional), it begins a chain reaction to help you to deal with it. An area of the brain called the *amygdala* sends messages to other areas of your brain and body telling them to respond; this is sometimes called your 'fight or flight' response. One area of the brain (the *hypothalamus*) will begin to increase your heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rate. Another area (the *pituitary gland*) sends messages down to your body to release stress hormones: *adrenaline* and *cortisol*.

**Adrenaline** causes your heart rate, blood pressure and breathing to increase or become more efficient.

**Cortisol** helps you release glucose into your bloodstream, so you have the energy you need to run away or fight.



## How do stress hormones make you feel?

Together these hormones are designed to help you, but when the 'threat' is an emotional one, such as when you learn that someone you love has died, they can make you feel on edge, jittery, short-tempered, out of control, panicky, or angry. And because grief does not suddenly disappear – like the threat of an angry dog would once you've escaped – your brain and body can stay in this heightened state for quite a while, affecting the way you think, plan, and organise yourself.

It's helpful to know stress has a **physical response**: your 'survival instinct'. It's not a 'fault', and your personality or identity haven't changed. You aren't 'going mad', 'going off your head', or 'going out of your mind', as some young people have described it.



## What can I do to feel calmer?

The good news is there are lots of things you can do to help yourself, and that mostly means doing things you enjoy! Whether it's sport or exercise, art, craft, music, writing or journalling, getting outdoors, snuggling a pet, or talking to friends, family, or another trusted adult, ask yourself: what will make me feel a bit better in this moment? A good balance of physical and creative activities and talking about things (if you can) will really help.

At times when big emotions are getting in the way, it can be hard to even think clearly and decide what to do. If you're feeling completely overwhelmed, the best trick is to use your breath. The side of your nervous system that causes your raised heart and breathing rate and blood pressure ('sympathetic') can be actively managed by switching on its opposite side ('parasympathetic') and a great way to do this is by controlling your breathing.

There are lots of different breathing techniques which you'll find with a simple online search, but the **most important thing is to breathe out more slowly and for longer than you breathe in**. Knowing the science should give you the confidence that it will work!



**PRACTICAL TIP**

Learning to recognise, scale (put into perspective), and regulate (learn to take control of) powerful and/or uncomfortable emotions is a skill for life. Our list of resources at the end of this booklet will give you some ideas and tools to help you over time.

Here are some of the things SeeSaw's young people have told us they struggle with – and what they have found helpful.

**WITHDRAWAL**

My family worry when I want to spend time alone in my room.

Wanting and needing time alone is really normal and can be a good thing, but life is about balance and it's important to still spend time with people you like and trust.

Try not to take yourself away from others too much. Be around people. Being alone made things more difficult but being around lots of people too quickly was also overwhelming. Choose the right people to be with.

15-year-old

**SLEEP**

I have found falling asleep hard: my mind goes into overdrive at night.

Listening to recorded rain sounds is peaceful and calming and can help me drop off.

14-year-old

**OVERWHELMING FEELINGS/  
MOOD SWINGS**

Waves of emotion can hit you when you least expect it. I can feel really angry and jealous when my friends talk about their loved ones a lot.

I tell people when I'm feeling a bit wobbly, so they know I am struggling and are a bit more thoughtful.

16-year-old

**WORRIES**

My biggest worry is someone else I love dying – I'm really scared of having to go through it all again.

When I'm feeling anxious about this I talk to someone I trust. I also use breathing exercises my SeeSaw worker taught me to help me calm down if I start to feel panicky.

**AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS**

When people don't talk about Mum or never mention her it feels weird. It's ok to talk about a person who has died. But I can also feel annoyed if they say something insensitive.

If someone asks you something awkward or upsetting, it's ok to say, 'I'm sorry, I can't talk about X, but Y feels ok'. I have had to guide people – they often don't know what to say.

14-year-old



# Section 4

## Saying goodbye

When someone important dies, part of our grieving process is finding a way to say goodbye. We may not have known someone was going to die, and so didn't have this chance when the person was still alive.

### **PRACTICAL TIP**

For many people, a funeral is a key part of the process of saying goodbye. If you are reading this immediately after someone's death and are preparing for their funeral, you may find it helpful to look at our 'Funeral support sheet' on the 'Help for young people' section of SeeSaw's website or contact SeeSaw directly for more advice.

## How can I say goodbye?

You may or may not have had the opportunity to attend a funeral. How you want to say goodbye to your person is up to you: you don't have to attend a funeral to think about them and say goodbye privately.

Key thoughts

Whether or not you attend a formal event to say goodbye, you can always remember them: holding on to memories is an important part of saying goodbye and processing grief. See Section 6 on page 29 for some more ideas on ways to remember your special person.

### PRACTICAL TIP

Whether you are attending a funeral, wake or memorial, or simply remembering an important person privately, here are some ideas to help you express what they meant to you and to say goodbye:

- Take a matching pair of something (toy, locket, crystal etc) and place one with your person in their coffin and keep one with you. Funeral directors can arrange for items to be placed in the coffin with your special person.
- Write them a letter – keep it in a memory box, burn it outside (safely!), or ask for it to be placed in their coffin with them. Writing down your private thoughts and feelings can help you process them.
- Treasures, flowers, cards, toys or drawings can go in/on the grave or memorial site, or in a memory box.
- Choose favourite songs that remind you of them to play at a ceremony or privately at home.
- Watch a livestream or recording of the funeral at home.
- Attend the wake or a memorial service/event if you were unable to attend the funeral.
- Plant a tree or flower in memory of your special person.
- Press floral tributes, or flowers and leaves from the grave site, to preserve them.
- Visit a special place and spend time reflecting.
- Light a candle and think about them/talk quietly to them/pray.
- Create a memory area at home – a space that reminds you of them. You might use pictures, a candle, plants, or special objects in the house or garden.
- Capture thoughts and memories from those who knew your special person: you could use Post-its and ask people to write on them, or in a book of condolence. You could also use tributes posted on social media or in cards.
- Raise funds for a cause of your choice in memory of your special person.
- Write a poem, short story or speech about them.
- Visit their grave/memorial site and think about/talk to your person. Leave a flower or painted stone.

# Section 5

## Which parts of my life might feel different following a bereavement?

It's common when someone dies for other life circumstances to change too. These might be practical or emotional changes, which might also feel like additional losses. This section looks at some of the changes young people sometimes face after someone important to them has died.



## I feel like I can't talk to my family about it: how can I help them understand what I am thinking and feeling?

After someone dies, all kinds of things can seem different in your family, including the way people communicate – or don't communicate – with each other. Often young people can feel like they're being left out of conversations by the adults in their life. This can be because adults want to protect young people from topics they think might be too difficult or upsetting. Although this is usually done with good intentions, it might make you feel like they don't value your opinion or involvement. Being honest and open with each other is really important between family members after a death and, if you can share how you feel with each other, it can make a painful situation feel more manageable.

What do you want to know/share? It can feel overwhelming when lots of things have happened in a short space of time; try sitting quietly and noting down your thoughts and questions.



### PRACTICAL TIP

How do you want to communicate? Having face-to-face conversations with a parent or carer can feel tricky: you might be worried about upsetting them, wondering how to find the 'right time' to talk, or struggling to express how you're feeling in words. Don't let this put you off – there are lots of ways you can communicate:

- **Write down your thoughts/feelings/questions in a letter and give it to the person.** If you don't feel ready to speak with them in person, you could ask them to write you a reply.
- **Ask to go for a drive/walk.** When you're face-to-face with someone, it can make a conversation feel intense and sometimes overwhelming. When you're side by side, it can feel much more natural because they're not looking at you. If you're walking, doing a job together, or in the car, it can also make it feel less awkward to have space for silences and 'thinking time'.
- **Have a jar where you can write down questions/thoughts/feelings.** An adult can then look at them at a time when they can give them their full attention. It can help to agree a time each week where you look through the jar together. Your adult could also put notes in the jar to help you understand how they are feeling/what they're thinking.
- **Talk to someone outside your family.** If you find it too difficult to speak with adults in your family, you could talk with a family friend, relative, teacher, or SeeSaw worker. You could ask them to share how you're feeling with the adults in your family on your behalf.
- **Emotion stones/Post-its/emojis** – if you think it would be helpful to have a quick and easy way to show someone how you're feeling each day, use a Sharpie to write different emotions on pebbles, Post-its, or use an emoji message. You can then leave the emoji that matches how you're feeling in a space/message for people to see. This helps your friends and family to know how you're feeling and how to best support you at that time.

I've found it hard that Dad doesn't feel comfortable talking about feelings – it makes me feel like he doesn't understand how I am feeling when I try to talk about Mum's death and how I feel. My advice to another young person who might not have a parent who's ready to listen to you is that it's really important to find someone else you trust who will listen – I used SeeSaw. I regret not finding someone to talk to sooner. Try and communicate with your parent though and remember that they are grieving too and be patient with them.

15-year-old

It is worth showing this section of the book to an adult to share with them the different ways you could agree to communicate.



## Returning to school: when should I go back?

There is no right or wrong answer to this question – it's something you'll need to decide together with your carer(s). Some young people feel they want to stay close to family for a while following a death; others want to go back to school as soon as possible. School offers a break from being surrounded by reminders of the death and can allow you to feel a bit of normality for a while – look back at the 'Dual process model' on page 13 for a reminder of how healthy grief switches in and out of different modes.

Key thoughts

Remember: it's ok to step out of your 'grief bubble' and think about or do other things without feeling guilty. Look at the 'Practical Tip' on page 25 for some ideas to help you feel more in control and confident about your return to school.

### Will everyone treat me differently?

Death is something that isn't talked about very often, so when someone dies, people don't always feel confident responding to those grieving. People are often worried about saying the wrong thing or upsetting a friend, so they might avoid talking about what's happened or become more distant. Alternatively, they might ask how you are, or if you're ok, which can feel like an insensitive question.

These reactions can be difficult and might make you feel more isolated, so it's important to communicate with those close to you about what you feel you need: that way they can know how to best support you.

Key thoughts

It can feel strange to be the one guiding your friends on how to talk about your bereavement, but you're the expert in what you need and it's ok to speak up – and they will almost always appreciate the guidance! We all have the power to be a supportive and helpful friend in difficult times if we are prepared to listen.

### PRACTICAL TIP

You could try the following phrases to start the conversation and give friends permission to relax and be normal around you:

- "I guess by now you've heard about...?"
- "It's been tough but what I need right now is to get back to normal – just treat me like you usually do."
- "Thanks for your message/kind words – I'm doing as well as can be expected at the moment."
- "Thanks for inviting me – I can't this time, but please do keep asking me: I'll say yes when I feel ready."
- "Thanks for asking, but I don't really want to talk about it right now."
- "Enough about me – what have you been up to?"

more on the next page



I found going back to school difficult as I was worried people would treat me differently, but school is so diverse and full of different people it was easier than I thought it would be to blend back in. **15-year-old**



## Returning to school: when should I go back? (continued)

### What if I'm not ok?

You might find that when you're at school you're able to get on with things and not think too much about what has happened.

But it's also likely you might have moments when you feel distracted, are struggling to concentrate, or are suddenly feeling overwhelmed, which can take you (and others) by surprise. It's helpful to plan out what you could do if this happens...

SeeSaw can talk with your school to help them understand how they can support you when you return. If you would like this, you or your parent/carer can contact us via our web referral form.

### PRACTICAL TIP

When you do decide to go back to school, it is helpful for you or a parent/carer to speak with a member of staff (your head of year/tutor/pastoral lead, etc) so you can talk through how things will be handled. Having a plan can help you feel more confident about going back.

You might want to talk about:

- **Which staff members you would like to be told and what details you would like them to know.** It is helpful for them to realise why you might be struggling to concentrate at times, and to be aware of any lesson content you might find difficult to face.
- **If you would like your friends/classmates to be told.** If so, who would you like to tell them and what would you like them to know. You could ask to be there if you wanted.
- **What options you have if you don't feel ok in school.** This might be a 'time out' card that you can show and go to an agreed place to get some space. If you find it helpful to be able to do something to take your mind off things when you feel this way, you could agree to have a book/journal/music to listen to/a fidget toy you can use.
- **Agree which person you can go to if you need to talk about how you're feeling.** If there is a member of staff you feel you have a good relationship with, you could ask if they could be the designated person you go to when needed: it doesn't always have to be your tutor or head of year.

After Mum died, my teachers treated me differently, which I found hard – it would have helped me more if expectations and encouragement to take part had remained the same, rather than backing off me as much as they did.

14-year-old

My closest friend talked to others on my behalf and explained what had happened and made sure they knew not to bring it up and to not let my mum's death affect how they treated me. They sent love, which helped.

15-year-old

Teachers found my bereavement hard to deal with: nobody knew what was happening to me until the last minute. SeeSaw can help by speaking to school about what can help you transition back to school after a bereavement.

14-year-old

## What if we have to move house?

There are different reasons people move house following a bereavement. It might be:

- because they can no longer afford to stay where they live
- to be closer to other family members or support networks
- to have a fresh start away from difficult memories

Whatever the reason for moving house, it can bring up lots of different emotions.

On this page you can see some of the reflections and advice young people have shared with us when moving house following a bereavement.

However you feel about moving house, it's important to try and communicate this with the adults around you so they know what you need and how to support you through this transition.

**I didn't have to move house, but Mum has had to move the house around – I can't stand seeing pictures of Dad still, so Mum has put them away. I have moved seats at the dinner table because I was still facing Dad's empty chair, which upset me. 13-year-old**

**If you have to move and don't want to, remember that your memories always come with you! A house is just four walls: memories don't just disappear, and you are still you, wherever you live. 17-year-old**

**Leaving the house that held memories of Mum being ill there felt good to let go of and not relive them every day I walked past her room. I had nightmares in my old house. These stopped when I moved. 15-year-old**

**The worst thing about having to move house after Mum died wasn't the move itself but having to find the motivation to pack up old things and go through memories. Try not to leave packing to the last minute – take your time and do your packing in bite-sized chunks so you can go through your memories at a manageable pace. 15-year-old**

## I feel like I'm losing my childhood!

This may sound strange but feeling your childhood is over can be a common feeling for young people after the death of a parent or close family member.

Here are a few reasons you may feel this way:

- You are an only child, or the eldest of your siblings, and now you feel you need to take on more responsibility to help your surviving parent or carer.
- Helping support other grieving family members can make you feel like you've had to grow up quickly.
- The things you associate with your childhood are strongly connected with the person who died, and you feel like it won't be the same without them.
- Worries about money, housing, or changes in family circumstances can enter your thoughts for the first time, increasing your awareness of more adult responsibilities.

Many young people we have spoken with say they felt they had to grow up more quickly than perhaps they would have done. If you feel this way, talk about it with your parent/carer. Although there may be certain things they cannot change, there might be things that can be done to help you feel better, such as: ensuring you still have time with your friends; doing the things you enjoy; having days when you're not responsible for certain things, and so on.

## Why am I worrying more about bad things happening?

After someone close to you dies, it can feel like your world has turned upside down. People and things you thought were safe, or would always be there, may have altered and that can feel scary. It's important to remember that you will rebuild your sense of security as time passes.

Key thoughts

When something sad, frightening, or difficult happens in life, it doesn't necessarily mean we are more likely to be unlucky again in future, so try to resist the temptation to worry about things that haven't happened.

## What if my surviving parent/carer meets a new partner?

There may be a point in future, following the death of a partner, that your surviving parent/carer feels ready to connect with someone new. When, how, and with whom is a deeply personal decision for them, as they will have a lot of feelings and practicalities to deal with, balancing their own needs and feelings with yours.

Young people tell us it can be an emotionally challenging time for them too. You may experience some of the following thoughts/feelings:

- the person who died is being forgotten
- your parent/carer doesn't care about the person who died anymore
- the person your parent/carer is dating is going to try and replace your mum/dad
- worries about blended families and a new partner's children entering the family
- your feelings don't matter/aren't being considered
- conflicting feelings, because you also want your parent to be happy
- your surviving parent is betraying your parent who died

These thoughts are completely natural. A parent meeting someone new is a big thing to deal with and it's ok if it makes you feel a mix of different emotions.

One of the biggest worries young people share with us is the concern that their parent dating someone new means that they have forgotten about their partner who died. This is a common feeling, but this is very rarely the truth of what's happening.

**Meeting someone new does not mean that a person no longer misses or loves their partner who died.**

Every situation is different, but it can help to try and understand things from your parent/carer's point of view. They may miss having the companionship of another adult, someone to help them and to keep them company. There will probably be a day when you don't live at home and your parent might wish to have someone to share their life with, so they are not lonely. Many parents explain to us that they never forget or stop loving the partner who died, even when they are in a new relationship. But as life moves forward, they find that they are ready to share it with someone else and to love and be loved by another person.

A good way to try and understand it is to think about parents who have several children. When a first child is born, they have so much love for them that they think it would be impossible for them to love anything as much; when they have a second child, they find they are able to love them both as just as much.

“ I am really worried Mum will meet someone new after Dad dies and that we will have to live with other children we don't know: what if we don't like them?  
12-year-old ”

## 28 What if my surviving parent/carer meets a new partner? (continued)

### PRACTICAL TIP

Knowing these things doesn't necessarily make it feel any easier, so it can be useful to find practical ways to help:

- **Communication is key.** Tell your parent how you feel. Try to do this in a calm way and focus on how it makes you feel: use sentences like, "When \_\_\_\_ spends time in our house it sometimes makes me feel uncomfortable and can upset me..." instead of, "I hate it when \_\_\_\_ comes round, I don't want you to see them." Don't be afraid to share how you feel. It's important your parent knows how their relationship is affecting you.
- **Compromise.** If you are finding things difficult or feel like things are changing too quickly, talk to your parent about finding compromises. Perhaps you could agree that when your parent is seeing their new partner, you can have a friend over, or do something together that you enjoy, helping ease any awkwardness.
- **Prioritise time together.** If you are concerned that your parent's new relationship is making you feel distant from them, try and set aside times to do something together: film nights, going for a walk, going shopping, etc.



Love is infinite – we don't have a limited supply. We make more space for each new person in our heart, without taking away love from anyone else.



# Section 6

## Adjusting to your 'new normal' and holding on to memories

We have looked at what happens immediately after someone dies, and how to manage responses and reactions when feelings are still new and raw, but what happens to grief over time? Look back at 'Growing around grief on page 12' and 'Dual process model on page 13': these are useful to remember when thinking about how you might feel as more time passes following a bereavement.

Many people think that grief lessens over time and you feel gradually better and better week by week. What is more accurate is that time and experience does allow us to become better at recognising and managing our difficult feelings more effectively, but you may still experience intense 'grief bursts' and find yourself moving between each circle of the 'Dual process' model as your life slowly adjusts and evolves: 'growing around your grief'.

Try to think of emotions and feelings as constantly evolving states. They can crash over us like waves one minute and then wash away, to be replaced and return in cycles of highs and lows, calm periods and more intense moments. People often describe life as a 'rollercoaster' for this reason.

“ You don't always have to 'keep going' – it's ok stop and rest and feel, take a break, and experience your emotions before carrying on with your journey. 16-year-old ”

It takes a lot of time to adjust to your 'new normal' after someone important has died. Many people don't feel ready to talk about or reflect on their loss for at least 6–9 months following a bereavement, so take your time and be patient with yourself and others.

When you feel ready, SeeSaw is here to talk, if you feel you'd find that useful. Some people don't want to talk at all for a very long time, so don't feel pressured into doing so if you don't feel ready.

Key thoughts



## Why can it be hard to think or talk about memories for a while after somebody dies?

Immediately after someone dies and for some time afterwards, thinking about your person and times you shared with them can feel too painful. You may not want to think, talk about, or even look at pictures of them for quite some time.

On the other hand, some people can become really attached to physical objects or photos that remind them of their special person – as we have said before, not everyone responds the same way.

“ You have to go through the pain and acknowledge it without blocking out your memories. You will feel conflicted, it is hard, but you’ll feel worse in the long run than if you don’t allow yourself to feel anything and shut things out completely – I regret doing that, and I am learning to deal with my difficult feelings in healthier ways now. **15-year-old** ”



## Why are memories important?

One of the most important tasks of grieving is coming to terms with your loss while being able to remember and think or talk about the person who died.

Although they aren't there in person anymore, we are still affected by the things we shared with them – and the things they may have taught us about life, ourselves, or the emotions we have for them. Realising this is an important piece of adjustment work in grief: although they have died, they are still a part of us and our experiences and always will be.

By finding helpful ways to preserve memories, it can help us move forward with hope, without clinging too tightly to our grief out of fear that we might forget someone special.



I have found it harder than some people to talk about my memories – they feel really distant, like they never really happened, or I have no attachment to them. Talking to someone from SeeSaw a year after Mum died, I am beginning to realise that it's ok to remember and talk about her and that it's better to reconnect with memories and take them with you than just try and move on without them.

17-year-old



Key thoughts

It may not seem possible to begin with but, in time, your memories will become a source of comfort as well as pain.

Key thoughts

Learning to hold onto useful, positive memories, while letting go of some of the more traumatic ones, is a task that will continue for some time. For tips on recording and remembering memories, see the next page.

## How will I be able to remember details about my person's life as time goes on?

Something lots of people worry about is forgetting the little details about their special person as more time passes. The ideas here offer a range of ways to hold on to different types of memories.

Memory is closely linked to our senses, so think about using **sight, sound, touch, smell** and **taste** to link and prompt your memory recollection.

### PRACTICAL TIP

Here's a list of memory activities you might want to use:

- **Build** a scrapbook of photos and things that remind you of them – song lyrics, tickets, recipes etc.
- **Set aside** a special 'memory box' to store things that hold meaning for you: items of jewellery or clothing; letters or cards; gifts; pebbles or feathers from walks you've taken together; or a bottle of their deodorant or perfume. You can find guidance on creating a memory box in the resources section of our website.
- **Make** a cushion cover from an item of clothing belonging to a loved one and spray it with their perfume; when you miss them, you can hug it to feel a sense of closeness and connection to their memory.
- **Create** a playlist of songs that remind you of them. They might be songs they liked, or particular songs you feel a close emotional connection to – songs that help you cry when you need to or uplift you on a down day.
- **Choose** three 'memory stones': a sharp one to represent difficult memories; a smooth one for everyday memories; and a shiny crystal for extra-special memories. Hold each stone in turn and feel its weight and shape in your palm. Think back to the type of memories it represents to remember all the aspects of your special person's life and what they meant to you.
- **Cook** a favourite meal your special person enjoyed cooking or eating – you might even want to collect their favourite dishes and recipes in your scrapbook or memory box.
- **Get out and about**, spending time in the places you visited with your person that mean something to you. Spending time outdoors in nature is particularly calming.
- **Research** facts and stories about your person that you might not have known. Apps like Record Me Now are designed to offer a range of prompts and questions to ask your special person, if they are still alive, or the people who knew them if they've died.

# Section 7 Moving forward with hope

## Can happiness and sadness exist together?

When learning to 'grow around grief', we are learning how to carry our grief over time, like a backpack: we take it with us, adjusting the straps and contents to spread the load as we walk through life, sometimes putting it down to rest, before picking it up and carrying on.

Eventually, though, the view alters and offers new perspectives. In time, it's possible to look back at more positive memories from the past, while enjoying new experiences in the present.

Key thoughts

Grief lasts as long love lasts – we can often find ourselves missing someone more as time passes following a loss, so some stretches of time will feel tougher than others.

“ I can now look back and laugh, remembering Mum's silly stories, and yet still have tears in my eyes at the same time. 15-year-old ”



## Will I ever feel happy again?

It's very common to feel destabilised following a bereavement, and to temporarily lose sight of your sense of motivation, purpose, and focus. But with the right support and strategies to recognise and manage difficult emotions, what we know is that most young people can move forward with hope – your loss doesn't necessarily have to negatively define your future.



Actively planning for your future while remembering to enjoy the little things in the present are good ways to keep yourself motivated.

### PRACTICAL TIP

Here are some tips young people have shared with us that helped them develop their sense of purpose following a bereavement:

- **Remember happiness can be found in small moments:** stroking a pet; appreciating fine weather; tasting good food; a laugh or hug with a friend; getting outside; a warm drink; feeling cosy or helping others can all be satisfying.
- **Journaling can help us identify the small wins in each day,** reminding us we have things we can achieve and appreciate still. Journals can be structured with prompts (see our resource list for recommendations), or more free form.
- **Get creative:** you might prefer to use a sketch book or even social media to reflect and explore life creatively through art, music, vlogging, or photography.
- **Make plans:** having something to look forward to can build our sense of hope for better times ahead and give us a sense of purpose.
- **Doing things for others can also enhance our sense of purpose and motivation,** whether that's helping around the house, being a study buddy, volunteering, fundraising for a charity, or just making someone else a drink.
- **Recreate successes:** try scoring each day out of 10; ask yourself what stopped things being worse than they were and what better moments you could build on and repeat in future?
- **Identify and celebrate your skills and qualities.** What skills, knowledge, and personality traits do YOU have that you can be proud of?

“ I am slowly starting to have more good moments than bad.  
14-year-old ”

## What advice and experience do the young people who have used the SeeSaw service want to share with you?

Looking back at the changes in their lives following a bereavement, young people using the SeeSaw service shared with us what they'd learned, felt proud of, and wanted to share with other young people in a similar situation.

Here's what they wanted you to know:

“ I am really proud that I still worked hard towards my GCSEs when Dad was ill and after he died. With support, I am now moving into sixth form to study Health and Social Care and Sociology. I want to be a hospital play specialist. I want a job where I feel I am helping young people and being alongside them in a non-medical way. I feel emotional support is really important for all young people. ”

“ I am proud that I haven't lost the few close friends I had. I have a tendency to block people out and push them away, but I didn't let go of my key people. I am proud of myself that I managed to stay in contact with a few key people as that has really helped me feel less alone. ”

“ It has helped me that I really believe asking for support will help me feel better. Talking to SeeSaw is like a big hug but with words! ”

“ If you find yourself using unhealthy coping strategies, please know there are other ways to cope; you may feel out of ideas and your sadness is too much, but there are people who will understand, and will help you to find a different, more healthy way of dealing with your difficult emotions. ”

“ Knowing you can share your darkest times with some special people and that they don't turn away is really powerful. Not everyone will stick around but you'll realise who your true friends are and talking to them really will help. ”

“ If in doubt about what you should do, always ask yourself: 'What advice would I give to someone else in my situation?' ”

“ I am proud that I didn't let anger take over my feelings, because you do feel angry sometimes. ”

# Recommended resources and activity worksheets

## Mental health and bereavement resources

### Websites:

- Winston's Wish – <https://help2makesense.org/>
- Child Bereavement UK – <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Listing/Category/support-for-young-people>
- What's Your Grief? – <https://whatsyourgrief.com/share-your-grief/>
- Grief Pal (for 18-35 year olds) – <https://griefpal.com/>
- Anna Freud Centre – <https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/>
- Young Minds – <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>
- Calm Harm – <https://calmharm.co.uk/>

### Apps:

- Apart of Me – <https://www.apartofme.app/>
- Record Me Now – <http://recordmenow.org/>
- Headspace – <https://www.headspace.com/>
- Calm – <https://www.calm.com/>

### Creative resources:

- SeeSaw resources – <https://www.seesaw.org.uk/resources-list/>
- Happy Self Journal – <https://happyselfjournal.com/collections/all-journals>

### Books, games, and films:

- A Monster Calls – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/25480342-a-monster-calls>
- Book list for grieving teens – <https://help2makesense.org/8-books-to-read-when-you-are-grieving/>
- Gaming for grieving teens – <https://help2makesense.org/games-that-can-help-you-to-cope-with-grief/>

# Self-care box

When we feel overwhelmed with emotions, it's helpful to do something that we know helps us feel better.

The only problem is - when we feel overwhelmed it can be difficult to decide what to do. Having a box full of things and ideas ready to use makes this much easier. Use this page to help you plan what you could keep in your box.

**Write a list here of some suggestions you could keep in your box.**

**What go-to items could you include?**

Have a bath  
Go for a run  
Play X-Box  
Watch Netflix



Bath bomb  
Hot chocolate  
Stress toy  
Mindful colouring



# Black and white

*Imagine one of these boxes is your life and your grief is the colour black. Colour in how much of your life your grief is taking up. Repeat it on different days to see how things change for you.*

DATE

DATE

DATE

DATE

DATE

DATE

# Helping hand

## Everyone needs a little help sometimes.

Everyone needs a little help sometimes. You might find lots of people are asking how you are or offering to help, or you might find people don't know what to say. However other people are reacting, you will know the people you can trust. It's helpful to think about who you want to have around you for support when you need it.



On this hand each finger represents a different area of support in your life:

- Home
- Friends
- School
- Outside school
- Anyone else

Try and think of someone in each area who could support you when you need it – write their name on the finger.

On the palm of the hand write down things you can do that make you feel better to remember how to give yourself a helping hand when you need it.

# Six word stories

*Our emotions can often feel very jumbled up and confusing and can be even more difficult to explain to someone else.*

Putting things into as few words as possible can sometimes help us express how we feel. For example:

**Home**

*Films, Chocolate, Cuddles, Happy,  
Sadness, Don't know how to cope*

Try writing six word stories for the areas below.

**About your  
loved one**

**About you  
before they died**

**Something that  
makes you angry**

**Something that  
gives you hope**

**About the death**

**A good  
memory**

**How you are  
feeling**

**Something that  
makes you  
anxious**

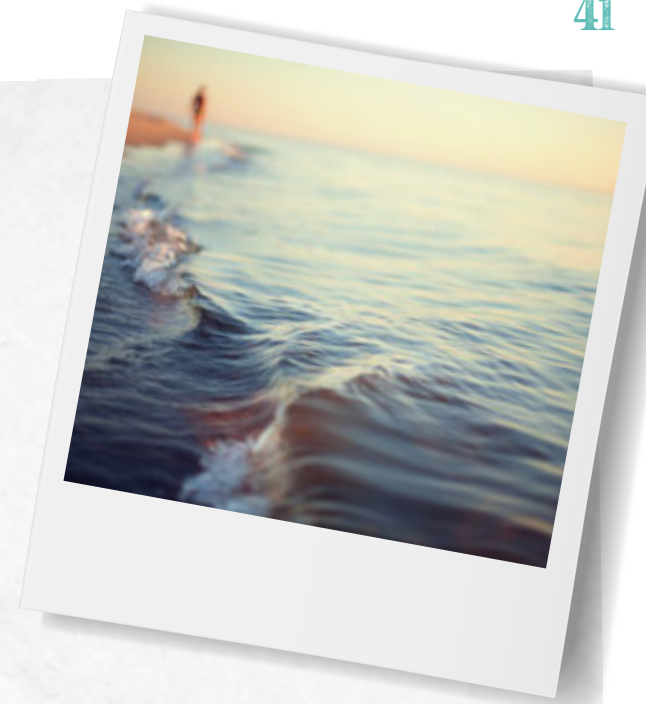
**What you wish  
people knew**

# Grief in pictures

**We can feel lots of different emotions after someone close to us dies.**

Some days feel better than others and some can feel like the worst day ever. Often it can feel like we don't have the right words to say how we feel inside even though we really want to share it with someone.

**Pictures can be an amazing tool to help express your feelings. Try taking pictures on your phone of something that helps express how you might be feeling. We have put some suggested hashtags below to help you think of things to focus on. We've left some spare to add your own.**



# whatisgoingoninside

# theywouldlovethis

# imissthis

# thisisgrief

# todayisagooodday

# memories

# keepgoing

# howi'mfeeling

# wishyoucouldseethis

#

#

#

# Memory salt jar

Young people have told us that they sometimes worry they will forget their memories of the person who died. Making a memory salt jar gives you a physical reminder of your treasured memories.

Each colour represents something you want to remember. For example, you might choose red to remind you of a jumper they would often wear, or yellow to remind you of a trip to the beach.

**The salt jar is personal to you, so no one else will know what it is for unless you choose to tell them.**

## What you need...

- small jar/clear container
- fine table salt
- soft coloured chalk pastels



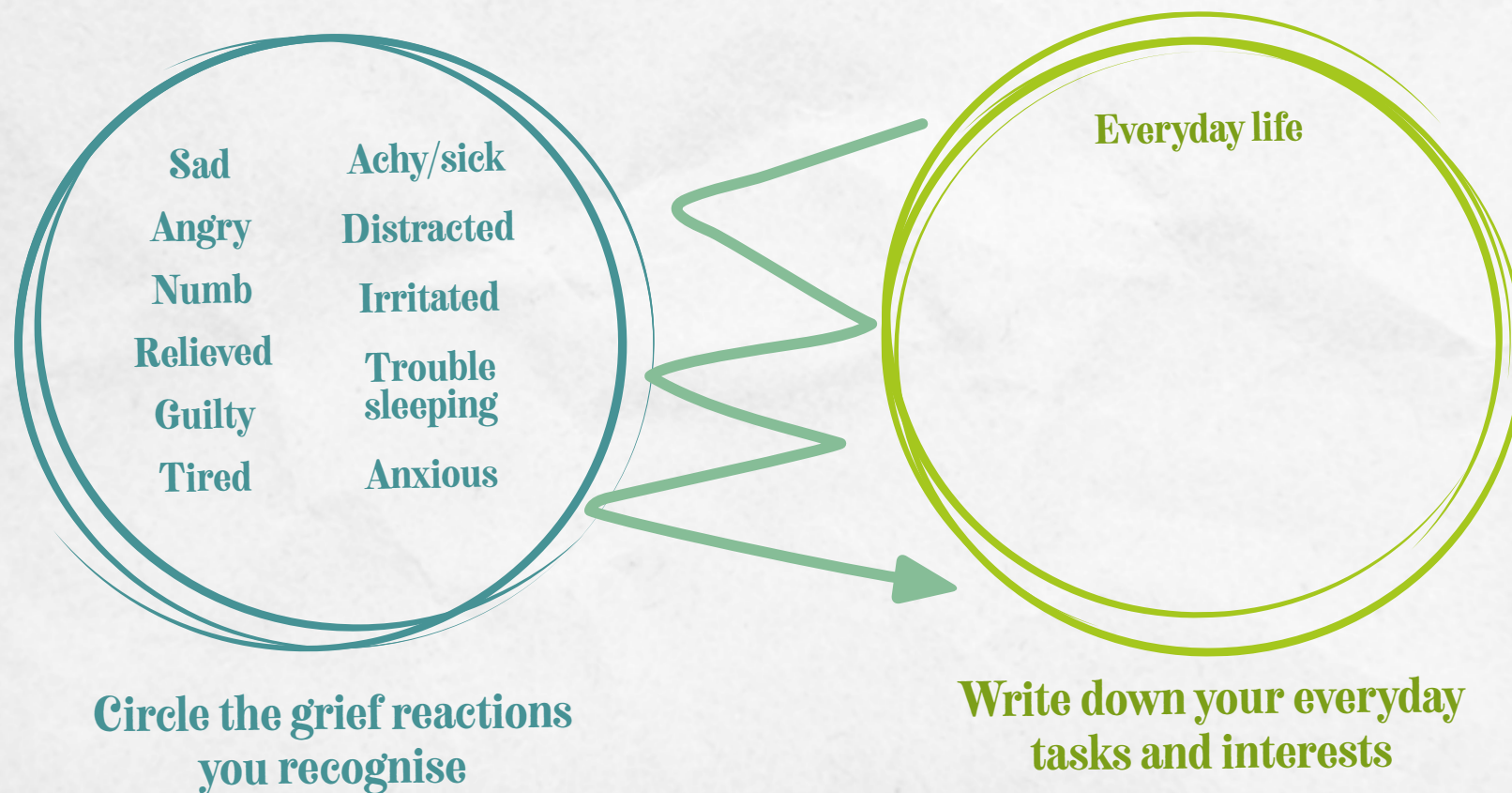
## How to make...

- Fill the jar with salt – right to the top.
- Split the salt into as many sections as you want – on different pieces of paper. (You'll need more for the top section.)
- Pick a colour to represent a memory/something about your special person.
- Rub the coloured pastel into the salt.
- Carefully pour the salt back into the jar, giving a gentle tap between each layer.
- Put the top on tightly – try not to shake!

# Dual Process model\*

*Healthy grief zigzags between both circles, spending time in each.*

This activity links to the 'Understanding grief – what the experts say' section on page 13. You might want to look back to remind yourself before doing this activity.



# Managing emotions



## Belly breathing

Lay down and place your hands – or a stuffed toy – just above your belly button. Breathing deeply into your diaphragm (the stomach muscle that moves up and down as your lungs expand and contract), watch your hands or special object rise and fall with each breath. Remember to breathe out slowly, as if you're blowing through a straw, making sure to empty every last bit of air from your lungs. Focus on the movement of the object/your hands as you do this. You can try this in a sitting position if you feel stressed when out and about and nobody will notice. Try doing it in the car/on the bus/in class/waiting at the doctor's.



## Mindful colouring

There are lots of mindful colouring pictures online that you can download and print or look for mindful colouring books to buy. Mindful colouring helps you to focus on one thing which might help if you feel your mind is busy with lots of thoughts.



## Journalling

There has been lots of research that shows that writing down our thoughts and feelings has a positive impact on our mental health. Writing things down can be like giving the thoughts buzzing around in our head a place to go. When you write something down it's as if your brain feels like it has done something with that thought and now it can move on. There are lots of good guided journals to buy, such as 'The Happy Self Journal', or you can just use a normal notebook. If you like to draw you can also draw out your thoughts and feelings.

## Get creative

Art (painting, drawing, collage, sculpture, crafting etc); writing (poems, short stories, lyrics, flash fiction); music (singing, playing, listening to); and dance can all help you explore and express your emotions.



# Managing emotions



## Self-care box

Find any kind of box and fill it with things that makes you feel calm or happy. If doing physical activities make you feel better, you could include a list of suggestions in the box too. Keep the box somewhere you can get to it easily and use it whenever you feel overwhelmed or are finding things particularly difficult. (See the separate sheet on page 37 to help you plan your box.)

## Exercise

Exercise is a great way to make you feel better. Exercising releases endorphins (known as the 'happy hormone') which make you feel more positive and energetic. When you don't feel great, exercise might be the last thing on your mind, but often when you make yourself do it you feel much better after. You don't have to be lifting weights at the gym – something as simple as getting outside for a walk, if you are able, will help, especially if you can spend time in nature. Exercise helps with sleep too!



## Sleep routine

If you're struggling to sleep, it can help to think about what you do before you go to bed. Try to avoid using screens for an hour before bed. Screens give off blue light which affects how well your brain produces melatonin, the hormone that makes you sleepy. Use this hour to start the process of winding down: a warm, comforting bath and/or hot drink can help you relax. You could lie on your back and listen to a guided meditation (there are lots on YouTube or try apps like Calm or Headspace). You might listen to some music or a podcast you find relaxing. If you are struggling with getting back to sleep if you wake in the night, instead of tossing and turning, get up and do something (avoid screens) like reading, or getting a drink. When you go back to bed it will help you to reset and get back into sleep mode. You could also put your headphones back in and listen to some gentle rain or ocean sounds.

## Recognising and regulating your emotions

Apps (such as Headspace, Calm, or Apart of Me), books, and journals can all help you identify, monitor, and respond to your emotions constructively. See our Resources section on page 36 for more ideas and recommendations.



### PRACTICAL TIP

Remember you don't have to be 'good' at something or an 'expert' for it to be of benefit – having a go, even in private, is the most important thing; you never know how it might help until you try. Practising the breathing exercises when you're feeling calm/ok will help you remember how to do them more effectively when you feel yourself becoming stressed/anxious/struggling to sleep. Practice makes perfect!

# Calm jar

Calm jars are great tools to help when you are feeling stressed or anxious. Simply shake the jar and watch the glitter swirl. As you watch, focus on taking slow deep breaths and feel yourself getting calmer.

## What you need...

- clear container
- water
- glitter/glitter glue
- food colouring

## How to make...

- Mix everything together in the container.
- Make sure the lid is on tight! (You might want to glue it on.)
- Give it a big shake.
- As you watch it swirl, take some deep breaths until the glitter has settled.



# Letter writing

Just like journalling, letter writing gives you a chance to express your feelings. Often when these feelings are written down, people find they feel better. Here are some suggestions for types of letters you might find it helpful to write.

A letter to say what you wish you had been able to say before they died

What are you upset or angry about? This could be to do with how they died, or things that happened before.

An update on what things have happened in your life – what have you done? Where have you been? What would they be interested to know?

A letter to say goodbye if you were not able to

You don't have to write letters on paper, you could:

- type them and save them
- set up an email address to send them to so they are all stored in one place
- record a video of yourself


What you do with your letters is up to you. Some people:

- keep them in a special place to look back on in the future
- rip them up/burn them. Throw them away if you don't want to keep them
- read them to someone you trust and talk through how you think your person might have responded

# Notes

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This booklet was written for  
SeeSaw by Annie Brylewska  
Cooper and Becki Gascoyne,  
SeeSaw Children and Family  
Practitioners.

“The pain of grief is just as much a part of life as the joy of love; it is, perhaps, the price we pay for love; the cost of commitment.”

Colin Murray Parkes

Source: *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life* (1972)

# SeeSaw Grief Support

For children and young  
people in Oxfordshire

## SeeSaw

Bush House, 2 Merewood Avenue, Oxford OX3 8EF

Enquiries and advice line: **01865 744768**

Email: [info@seesaw.org.uk](mailto:info@seesaw.org.uk)

[www.seesaw.org.uk](http://www.seesaw.org.uk)

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