



## Responding to Grief and Emotional Suffering in our Communities



The latest figures report that 21,768 people have now died due to coronavirus. Their families are struggling to come to terms with the circumstances of their loss at a time when the usual process for grieving has been completely disrupted.

Of course, 600,000 people die each year in the UK for a whole number of reasons. And with social distancing restrictions in place, and limitations on how funerals can be conducted, those who are bereaved are facing additional stress and anxiety.

### Coming to terms with other losses

But beyond death, many of us are coming to terms with other losses in our lives.

Up to two million workers have lost their jobs already since lockdown began. And research by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex anticipates that around 6.5 million people in total could find themselves without work as a result of the crisis.

Beyond this, others are grieving the loss of stability, security and the usual social structures that we rely on. The emotional and psychological strain of all this is akin to bereavement.

In light of these vast and complex needs, we have developed a five-step plan to help your church respond with kindness and compassion to those experiencing bereavement and loss.

**NHS emergency helpline** for anyone whose loved one has died in hospital.  
0800 2600 400 [www.gmmh.nhs.uk/](http://www.gmmh.nhs.uk/)

**GriefChat** enables you to speak online with a trained grief counsellor.  
[www.ataloss.org/live-chat](http://www.ataloss.org/live-chat)

**Cruse Bereavement Care** offer a range of resources including a helpline.  
0800 808 1677 [www.cruse.org.uk/](http://www.cruse.org.uk/)

**FRONTLINE** provides telephone support for key workers, emergency services teams, care workers and those in the health profession  
116 123 [www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/ourfrontline/](http://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/ourfrontline/)

**Samaritans helpline** is available 24/7 on [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) **116123**

**Childline** provides confidential support for children and young people  
0800 11 11 [childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk)

## 1. Understanding Grief?



- **Grief is a natural process.** Grief is never easy, but it's the way that we adapt to change around us.
- **It's not just about death.** While most of us understand grief in the context of losing a loved one, we may feel the same emotions when we experience loss in other areas of our lives; such as losing a job, divorce, health challenges or even social interactions.
- **Many things trigger grief.** The isolation we're experiencing now, may lead us to dwell on old memories and losses, enhancing our feeling of grief. Without someone else to work through these emotions with, they can remain unprocessed.
- **Grief is a long journey.** Support is often available for those who have recently been bereaved. However, the most painful part of the grieving process may come months or even years after the initial loss.

### Useful Resources

The Bereavement Journey booklet helps answer questions about grief and faith. [thebereavementjourney.org/resources/faith-questions-in-bereavement](http://thebereavementjourney.org/resources/faith-questions-in-bereavement)

At a Loss provide information to help churches support those experiencing bereavement at this time. [www.ataloss.org](http://www.ataloss.org)



## 2. Recognising the Signs

- **Familiar signs.** Bereavement often comes with feelings of shock, numbness, sadness, anger, guilt and anxiety.
- **Other signs.** In addition to the familiar signs, people may also display other signs such as an inability to focus on normal tasks; a change in their sleeping patterns; fatigue or low energy, headaches or upset stomachs; or changes in their mood.
- **Symptoms fluctuate.** Grief is characterised by changes in mood. One day someone might be feeling fine, and the next day something may trigger them to recall a painful experience resulting in a shift in mood.

## 3. Providing Immediate Support



- **Contact.** We often shy away from talking about loss for fear of making the situation worse. However, the person who is grieving is living with constant pain – encouraging them to talk about their feelings can only help.
- **Listen.** You're not there to find solutions. Every situation is different, so don't assume you know how they're feeling, but you can show that their feelings matter. The more opportunity someone has to tell their story, the more they'll be able to process their grief and come to terms with their loss.
- **Bless.** You may not feel you can do much, but find opportunities to show someone they are valued by sending a card, giving a small gift, offering to do their shopping, or even helping them with other admin. Make sure it's not a one off – grief takes time and it will really help someone to know they are not alone.

### Useful Resources

**Loss and Hope** is a coalition of Christian organisations that provide resources for churches seeking to support the bereaved. [www.lossandhope.org](http://www.lossandhope.org)

**This short film** gives practical advice on how to support those experiencing bereavement.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2lp6SXsADU&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2lp6SXsADU&feature=youtu.be)



#### 4. Equipping Your Church to Respond

- **Recognising grief as a church.** We live in a 'death defying society', where we aren't generally very good at supporting those experiencing bereavement. It's a challenging issue, but churches need to become better at talking about grief, to stop it being such a taboo subject.
- **Providing group support.** In many situations it's helpful for individuals to know that they are not alone. Being part of a group with others who are also grieving can be helpful. Some churches have successfully set up such groups online, overseen by a facilitator.
- **Don't over spiritualise grief.** As a church we can over spiritualise grief and fail to recognise the role that professional psychologists and counsellors play in helping individuals to process their grief. Churches need to know that they don't have to solve all the problems – they should look to involve professionals as and when it's appropriate.
- **Train facilitators.** While everyone can play their part in supporting those who are experiencing loss, it's important to have individuals who are trained to respond. Supporting those who are grieving can be draining, and it's also important that you have individuals who know when it's appropriate to seek professional help.
- **Support for men.** Typically, men don't reach out for bereavement support as readily as women do. It's worth developing initiatives that reach out specifically to engage men.
- **Support young people.** Young people also process grief in a different way, and there are specific organisations that help children and teenagers. Children can often appear resilient, but experiences make a lasting impact, so it's important they receive support.

**Care for the Family** provides resources to help churches plan their response to bereavement.

[www.careforthefamily.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/CFF-Walk-Through-the-Valley-Church-Leaders-Bereavement-Guide.pdf](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/CFF-Walk-Through-the-Valley-Church-Leaders-Bereavement-Guide.pdf)

**Peer support for men** is available through the At a Loss website. [www.ataloss.org/bereavementsupportformen](http://www.ataloss.org/bereavementsupportformen)

**Childhood Bereavement Network.** [www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

**ListeningPeople** supports children and young people through loss [www.lossandhope.org](http://www.lossandhope.org)



#### 4. Know When to Reach for Professional Help



- **You don't need all the solutions.** As a church you don't need to solve all the issues that someone is presenting. Those experiencing grief may also experience serious mental health needs which could escalate if they don't receive professional support.

- **Know where to refer people.** It's important that you have details of mental health services in your local area as well as

professional counsellors that you can refer people to if you are concerned that they may have depression, be suicidal or are developing other addictions.

**At a Loss** provide a web chat facility for individual. [www.ataloss.org](http://www.ataloss.org)

**Living Loss** provide trained counsellors to work with individuals.  
0208 769 5174 [www.living-loss.org](http://www.living-loss.org)

**Association of Christian Counsellors.** [www.acc-uk.org](http://www.acc-uk.org)

**British Association** for counsellors and psychotherapists. [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

**UK Council for Psychotherapy.** 0207 014 9955 [info@ukcp.org.uk](mailto:info@ukcp.org.uk)



## 5. Preparing for life beyond COVID-19



- **It will get worse before it gets better.** Grief is a long process, so the issues many are experiencing won't evaporate when lockdown ends. Evidence suggests that while suicide rates drop during time of national crises, they dramatically increase in the aftermath of major events, so churches need to be prepared.

- **Train your teams now.** Grief groups are a very effective way to help individuals process their emotions. There are great online training courses now available, which you can use to prepare your teams for the future.

**The Bereavement Journey** is a six-week course developed by Holy Trinity Brompton with films and discussion groups to help churches support bereaved process their loss. [www.thebereavementjourney.org](http://www.thebereavementjourney.org)

Churches that want to run the course online will need to attend three training webinars See [www.lossandhope.org](http://www.lossandhope.org) or email [projectleader@lossandhope.org](mailto:projectleader@lossandhope.org) to learn more about the training webinars.

**Living Loss** help churches establish grief groups with their churches. Over the next few months they'll be providing online training and resources to equip church members to facilitate these groups. 0208 769 5174 [www.living-loss.org](http://www.living-loss.org)