

Cruse Bereavement Care



Grief within the Family

Our way of grieving is as unique to each of us as our fingerprint, and this can cause particular problems when a family is affected by grief.

There may be assumptions or even expectations that everyone in the family should react to or cope with their loss in similar ways. You might find it easier to deal with problems by talking about them and working through what is troubling you, whilst others may want space to think things through or feel that talking is just too painful. What is important is that no one method of coping is more 'right' than any other. Each individual should try to understand the other, respecting different methods of coping.

Conflict can arise in terms of which family member is seen to be the most affected or distressed. It is sometimes easy to make assumptions about this and ignore family members whose need for help might be as great, if not greater, than that of the person who is identified as being most in need. Each family member will be affected by the unique dynamics of the relationship between themselves and the dead person. These can include:

- The closeness of the relationship
- The events before the death
- The factors around the death itself, including level of involvement of the family member (for example, whether or not they were present at the time of the death, their role in the funeral arrangements, etc.)

There are a number of emotions that may be common to the whole family.

Guilt

Generally felt for things done or not done, for which you feel personally responsible. When someone feels a high level of guilt, it is important for them to talk through why they behaved as they did, and decide whether with hindsight they can accept and forgive themselves for behaving as they did.

Blame

Guilt often leads to blaming others, since blame is one way of lessening personal guilt.

Idealisation

When someone has died, it is common to remember all the good things about them and sometimes to build a myth that they were little short of perfect. Conflict can arise in many families when this image of perfection is shown to be flawed. Sometimes finding that the person who died was not in fact exactly the person that you thought can cause anger to be directed towards them. Alternatively this anger can be directed towards another in the family. A 'scapegoat' is identified. Such anger needs to be diffused or it is likely to get in the way of our grief.

Jealousy

Another emotion that can occur within a family after a death is jealousy of other family members regarding their relationship to the dead person, or their share of the legacy. Questions arise as to how valued you were by the person who has died.

Help can come from:

- family members being sensitive to each others' needs, even as they struggle to cope with their own loss
- individual one to one bereavement support for some family members